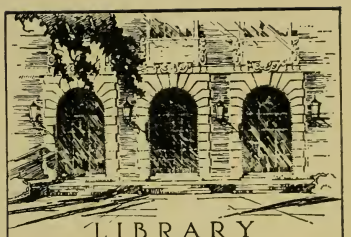
A Mingled Yarn

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM'



LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS
823
M193m
v.2

A MINGLED YARN.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

http://www.archive.org/details/mingledyarnnovel02mack

A MINGLED YARN.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. HENRY MACKARNESS,

AUTHOR OF "A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM," "A PEERLESS WIFE," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

"Life is a mingled yarn of good and evil."

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON.

1872.

(All rights reserved.)

LONDON:
PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET
AND CHARING CROSS.

823
M193m
v.2

A MINGLED YARN.

CHAPTER I.

Miss Clarinda Northcote, the sister of Mrs. Ashleigh, had been, perhaps, in her day the handsomer of the two girls, and still bore traces of the old beauty, though their characters were widely different. Born in Ireland, of Irish parents, they had many of the characteristics of their nation, and Eleanor especially had the warm temper and excitable nature of her race; but Clarinda had, with less excitement, the sharpness and wit. She was many years the oldest, and had always exercised a kind of censorship over her sister, whose

marriage with Ashleigh she had striven to prevent, having all along disliked him; but Eleanor was too passionately in love with the young and handsome Everard Ashleigh to listen to reason, and they married and went to England, and from there abroad, and for many years did not meet; and only by the changed tone of the letters could Clarinda guess that her young sister had found how right she had been in her estimate of Ashleigh's character. She had in Eleanor's great trouble been again her friend and counsellor—giving up her home in Dublin to come and live near her in England; and only at times, when the temptation grew too strong, did she remind her of the warning she had so blindly neglected. To her house her two nephews first betook themselves, and found her preparing to go to Mrs. Ashleigh.

"Oh, here you are!" she said, in the blunt

manner which she assumed to cover any emotion; "I have had endless messages from poor Eleanor about this unhappy child. She seems to sit and fancy every imaginable horror—and something fresh every two minutes—so I thought I'd better go and stay with her and hear all her suggestions, without giving her the trouble of sending."

"Poor mother!" said Walter; "she was always rather a self-torturer; but you will acknowledge it *is* perplexing."

"*I* see through it perfectly. *I* know your charming father: he stops at nothing to further his views. He has sent Grace somewhere himself, and acts that anger and dismay to mislead you."

"Then, aunt, I know what I shall do," said Everard; "return to-morrow by the first train, and tell him that I insist on his saying where he has placed her, threatening to leave the house, both of us, and never

return to it, unless he tells me. He will not like that. He detests a scandal, or that the world should talk of his affairs, and he hates to live alone."

"Well try that if we hear no tidings of her to-day. Ah! he and his brother are a sweet couple! Did you ever hear the story of your nice uncle?"

"No; my father has seldom mentioned him: I only know we had an uncle."

"Yes; a nice specimen he was: handsomer, if possible, than his brother, he managed to make a little, silly creature fall in love with him. She was as lovely and as bright as a butterfly; and about as wise. She married an old man for his money, who worshipped her, humoured her every whim, and lavished his wealth upon her without stint. She rewarded him by playing the fool with Seymour Ashleigh, until she got caught in her own trap, and loved him with

all a woman's devotion and folly. The old man was one day seized with a mysterious illness, and died. The doctor, unable to account for his death, had a *post mortem* examination, and discovered he had died from poison. Strong circumstantial evidence was brought against the wife and the man —whose name had been coupled with her's continually—and they were both arrested on suspicion, and tried for his murder; but the charges brought could not be substantiated, and they were dismissed with the verdict, "Not Guilty;" but it was, of course, a settler for them in the eyes of society. He left the place; and, she, poor weak thing, thought it better to die, leaving her very beautiful, little girl alone in the world, but, luckily for her, a wealthy heiress. She was then but fifteen—a strange, decided little body; and, refusing the many offers of a home offered her, chose to share the humble

one of her foster mother. And there she was when I left Dublin: her money put out at interest, and accumulating, till, I suppose, she will have a splendid amount when she choses to use it."

The young men had remained mute with astonishment, whilst in a quick, sharp voice their aunt had related the history. Walter was the first to speak, with a white, stern face, yet very calmly he said:

"Then we have the honour of being the nephews of a suspected murderer? —pleasant!"

"Too true," answered Miss Northcote, with a slight shrug of her shoulders.

"And what has become of him," asked Walter.

"That no one knows. I believe he has not been heard of for years; but, come, we must go to poor Eleanor."

"Yes, we must," said Everard, who had

looked painfully thoughtful since his aunt's narration. "Is my mother aware of this agreeable part of our family history?"

"Oh, yes! of course, she is; and I have always said you boys ought to be told. And now I've told you, whether they like it or no. Better you should hear it from me than from a stranger."

"Yes, certainly; we ought to have known it before; but it might have been worse. We know now how we stand," said Everard, holding out his hand to his brother, who took it silently. "We can be careful to run no risk of involving *others* in our shame. I am not too late in this warning, am I, Walter?"

Walter's face flushed, but he answered:

"No, old man, not a bit;" and so, saddened by a great burden, which they felt must rest on their lives for ever, they started on the quest which had for a time been

almost forgotten in this new and unexpected ill news.

They arrived at the house in which, since her return to England, Mrs. Ashleigh had taken up her residence, and at the sight of her sons, she burst into a passion of tears.

"Now, Eleanor, that is no use to you, and very painful to us," said her sister; "pray calm yourself, or we shall waste our time, which might be employed in finding the child."

"Find her! we shall never find her. He has murdered her," said Mrs. Ashleigh, passionately, lifting her head from Everard's shoulder, who had taken her in his arms at her first outburst of tears.

"Oh dear, no! my love," answered Miss Northcote. "He has much too great a regard for himself to do anything of the sort. It will be through some very extraordinary oversight if he ever puts himself within

reach of the law. He is very jealous of the child's love for you. He has discovered that you have broken your word to him and come to England, and that you go down to the Priory to see the children—at least Grace in particular—and he has hidden her from you. You should not have broken your word, and this would not have happened."

"Folly, Clarinda!" said Mrs. Ashleigh, impatiently; "you are not a mother."

"No, my dear, as far as I know, and I am very glad of it. Life is quite disagreeable enough without making it worse by a never ceasing anxiety and never ending disappointment, which is all I can see children are to their parents."

"Oh, Auntie! that is very hard," said Walter, smiling at this sweeping denunciation.

"Very hard on the parents? Yes, so it seems to me; but we shall know all about

that and many other things by-and-bye, and see how right they all are by a better light than is vouchsafed us here, and learn that our sorrows are our own making, which no doubt they are, the most of them. But now, boys, tell your mother what you know of this business, and then let us hold a council of war."

In an old-fashioned garden, with pleached alleys and grass walks, and trees cut in fantastic shapes, and myriads of old-fashioned flowers filling the air with sweetness—stocks, lavender, southernwood, sweet-briar, and the dear old cabbage rose;—in this garden, walking down one of the paths, were a young girl and an old lady in earnest conversation. The elder lady was dressed in a black serge dress, with white collar and cuffs, a white linen cap, and soft grey hair braided beneath it. Her eyes were the deepest, darkest brown; and, though her face

was very pale, the lips were rosy and full, displaying a row of beautiful teeth. Her voice was very low and gentle, and her speech slow and measured.

"My child," she said, "you shall not be detained one minute longer than the arrival of your father, whom I momentarily expect. He will, doubtless, explain his motives to you, and you will act accordingly."

"He has deceived me," said the girl, tears streaming down her face; "and I will never believe him again."

"Oh! not so; the mistake will be settled when you see him. Hark, now! and I will read to you how kindly he wrote;" and she drew from her pocket a letter, and read it aloud:—

"My Good Mrs. Ambrose,

"I have sent you my little girl—my darling child—to protect her from

a danger I fear for her. I have had to practice a little 'ruse' on her to get her from home: she will expect to find her mother with you and be disappointed, poor dear child! Comfort her till I come, and I will explain all to you and to her, and we will make arrangements about her further stay with you—to which I hope she will agree; but I would not force her inclination, poor love!

"Yours always, with the highest esteem,

"E. Ashleigh."

"See, Madam, this is what I received," said poor Grace, scarcely able in her excitement to listen calmly to the end:—'My child, come to me, I am ill. You will be met at the station,' giving this address and name, and to what station I was to take my ticket. I never dreamt I was deceived. I saw the hand was feigned, but thought my poor

mother had done it for safety, and started at once——"

"Like a kind, loving child," interrupted the old lady. "Your father will explain why he thought it necessary to deceive you, and all will be well. You shall go at once, too, my child, if you do not like to stay. My young people go and come as they will: I exercise no restrictions on them in that particular. They come here, when in sorrow, for rest and refreshment: they find it in a useful happy life, which, when they are tired of, they can leave. But," she said, with a sweet smile, "not many go. My life has been very heavily burdened, and in all my sorrows I have found my best earthly comforts in active, useful employment; and when, by the death of a relative, I found myself left handsomely provided for, and with this house for my own, I thought I would try to establish some Home where

the sad and weary could find comfort as I had found it."

"Is it a sisterhood, then?" said Grace, interested in spite of herself.

"No, not so called. Without any of the rules or restrictions of any Order, I offer a home to eight young persons who, from any misadventure or misfortune, need one; and we educate and support eight orphans from the poorer classes. For this object the young ladies pay me a small yearly sum, and assist in the education and care of the children. We make all their things at home, and have our laundry, bake-house, and dairy; and, in short, make all we want on the premises. I have quite a farm—worked by a worthy man I have known from a child; and so, over the surface of our respective sorrows, there is laid down, as it were, a green turf—as you lay it above a grave—whereon grow the

fair blossoms of Hope, Faith, and Resignation."

Grace looked up in the kindly face and listened—with an interest, which she could scarcely have believed she could have felt in anything at this moment—to the low gentle voice, and the tale she told; and then she asked how her father came to think of sending her to Mrs. Ambrose.

"Many years ago—at the time when one of my numerous misfortunes fell on me—your father, who was then one of a large and wealthy firm abroad, lent me a sum of money, which helped me to open a school: by which I was enabled to support myself until I came into this property. I could not repay him all the sum until then; and, therefore, we have had much correspondence. He knew and approved of my scheme; and, I suppose, thought it was a safe place for

you to remain in, until the danger he apprehends is over."

"It is no danger, Mrs. Ambrose. He wants to keep me from my mother: he is cruel."

"Ah, poor child! it seems cruel to you, I know; but, no doubt, he is right, and perhaps you will some day think so. Let me now show you over the Home; it will pass the time until your father arrives."

When he did come, an hour or two after, he talked so long and so well to Mrs. Ambrose, that he left her full of compassion for his troubles, and entirely of his opinion that Grace should be carefully kept from all intercourse with her mother; and she, poor child, sick and worn out with excitement and anxiety, seemed willing at least to stay, as Mrs. Ambrose proposed, on a week's visit in the sweet, bright, peaceful home, where there were companions of her own age,

whose cheerful faces and useful busy lives were in such contrast to hers, and whom it was a pleasure and comfort to look at. The days seem to glide away as she sat with folded hands watching them teaching, working, cooking for the sick—bright and busy always; and as she thought of the dull home, the long hours of loneliness, the fearful scenes of passion, with the constant dread of the outbreak always hanging over her, she felt for once grateful to her father, and even hoped that her stay might be prolonged beyond the stipulated week.

After every suggestion made by Mrs. Ashleigh and Miss Northcote had failed in arriving at any satisfactory conclusion, Everard and Walter took their leave of their mother, promising to see her again in the morning to prosecute their search. On arriving at Walter's lodgings, he found a

letter for him, which he tore hastily open. It was from his father :—

"My dear Boy,—

"I am sorry my little bit of fun has been carried so far, and that poor Everard has taken the trouble to go to town in search of his truant sister. I will confess the truth : she is gone on a visit to a former friend of mine ; and my anger and alarm were pretended. I wanted to see how you would take it. You little thought your father was so good an actor. Now Everard has come to town, he had better, perhaps, stay with you till Saturday. The workmen will be noisy and disturb him—one of the reasons I had for getting dear Gracie away. I shall not be dull, so do not be anxious about me—enjoy yourselves together, and on Saturday return to

"Your affectionate Father."

Walter only raised his eyebrows in a little way peculiar to him, re-folded the letter, placed it in the envelope, laid it on the table, and looked at his brother.

"Walter," said Everard, "was there ever his match on earth? What does it mean?"

"Dolly was right, you see," said Walter.

"Yes; but what was the motive?"

"To get her away from mother, of course."

"Well, but what was the necessity for concealment—for pretending he did not know where she was?"

"To get her well away before we could interfere; and now, you see, he does not tell us *where* she is. I wonder if he has forbidden her to write to us?"

"I should think it likely. I always doubt him most, when he is most affectionate. Depend upon it, that his first idea or plan has been a failure; and, as he never ac-

knowledges a failure—not even to himself—he pretends now it was all fun, and he had no desire for concealment."

"Exactly. He thought you, dear old man, would not take the matter up so warmly; that, buried in your books, you took so little note of passing events, that we might all be dead and buried before you would stir."

"What a mistake he made, Walter, did he not?" answered Everard, with that sweet smile that at times made his face almost beautiful. "As if the constant and unwearied contemplation of God's great love, shown in all His wondrous works, had power to root out the 'love for one another' which he has enjoined: if I thought it would, I would burn all my books."

"I believe you—perfectly. With all your learning, you have not forgotten the best of

all learning. But, now, what is to be done? We had better let the mother at once know the child is safe. We will jump into a cab, and go and tell her."

"Very well—as you think best," answered Everard.

"Then, to-morrow, I should like Rupert to see it; and get him, if he can leave his uncle, to come down with us on Saturday. He's a capital fellow to see through people and things. I think he can tackle the governor rather better than we can."

"Yes—a good idea. We will act upon it. Are we to answer this epistle?"

"Yes—in this wise;" and, taking up a piece of paper, Walter wrote :—

"DEAR FATHER,—

Your excellent joke has given us a great deal of trouble; but we do not

mind that, now we know Grace is safe. No doubt she will have returned home by Saturday, and be ready to welcome us and Rupert Carrington, who will come with us, if his uncle is no worse.

"Your affectionate son,

"WALTER."

"That last phrase sticks in my pen," he said, handing the letter to his brother; "but I suppose it's the proper thing to do. You know, don't you, that's one of his little games—to secure Rupert for Grace?"

"Oh, no! I was not aware of that; but the parties chiefly concerned are not of the same way of thinking, are they?"

"Not at all; but I am glad to have this weapon to use. I say, Everard," he continued, after a pause, as he slowly put up the letter in its envelope and directed it, "we could not let anyone marry our little

sister in ignorance of our pleasant little domestic history?"

"No — certainly not; and we must give up such hope for ourselves, too, Walter."

"Yes; but a girl would not be much worth having who would cut a fellow for such a reason."

"It wouldn't be the girl, my dear Walter; it is the friends who would object."

"Ah!—yes!—well, never mind now. Come along."

On their return home from their interview with their mother, which had a little consoled her, as they passed the staircase window, on their way to their rooms, Everard stood for a moment to look out at the stars, which, even in the smoky atmosphere of London, were gleaming like jewels in the sky.

"How beautiful those are, Walter," he

said, looking up at them. "Earthly vexations seem so small and insignificant;

'The star of the unconquered will—
He rises in my breast;
Serene, and resolute, and still,
And calm, and self-possessed.'

—As one by one *our* hopes depart, we shall know, perhaps, 'how sublime a thing it is to suffer and be strong.'"

"Yes, old man; the battle of life began very early with us."

"It did; but without labour there is no rest—without fighting no victory. God bless you!—good-night."

CHAPTER II.

It was a dull, grey day, with a chill wind blowing—a sort of fore-shadowing of the autumn soon to be expected—as the Ladies Murray, Mistress Medlicott, Mademoiselle, and Dr. Stillwell, walked through the grounds of the old Manor House on their way from church.

May and Edith were walking together; Gertrude with Dr. Stillwell, whom she was putting through a sort of catechism about his journey with poor old Poyntz, and when the new master was coming, and whether the curate kept the school every day, etc., etc.; and Lilian was following more leisurely with Mistress Medlicott and Mademoiselle.

"What could have made Lilian feel faint in church, Edith?" asked May. "I think it's quite cold to-day."

"Yes; and the church was cold too. I don't think she was faint—she seemed more flurried and upset. I suppose Grace Ashleigh's away—she was not at church."

"Yes," answered May, as though her thoughts were not with Grace Ashleigh. "I say, Edith, don't you think there is something mysterious about Lilian? I think she's in love."

"Of course you do, my dear. Because you are in that happy state yourself, you imagine everyone else is."

"No; but, really, now, Edith, a hundred little circumstances convince me she is: only I cannot think who with. You know last season she refused three first-rate offers. To tell you the truth," said May, blushing and laughing, "I was at one time afraid it

was Philip; because you know he used to go everywhere we did in town, and always danced with Lily and sat by her; and once, I remember, he came with a lily in his coat, and it made me cross all the evening."

"Poor May!" laughed Edith; "it's no great difficulty to do that, is it?"

"Oh! I don't know. I dare say if you thought Mr. Prescott liked me best, you'd be cross—temper under such circumstances is excusable."

"Nonsense, May; don't be ridiculous! I cannot think what you and that foolish child Gertrude have got in your heads about Mr. Prescott. He's an amusing rattle, and that's all."

"Ah, Edith! it's all very well. You may not care for him now, but he cares for *you*; and he'll make you care for him, or I'm mistaken."

"*Make* me, eh, May? He *will* be clever.

He would stand alone as the only human being who had ever *made* me do anything."

"Ha, ha! we shall see," said May, running laughingly into the house. "Are you going to sketch the Abbey to-morrow? Oh, Edith! that was the thin end of the wedge;" and, running upstairs, she avoided the lecture she fully expected.

In Auntie's room sat Lilian. Mistress Medlicott had sent for her, and she sat now in a low chair, her small delicate fingers clasped rather tightly together, and a flush upon her cheeks, that were usually so slightly tinted.

Her aunt sat near her; and, as she talked to her, fixed on her a scrutinising glance, which, if Lilian's eyes had been raised to note it, would have increased her embarassment.

"My little girl," she began, "I have

sent for you because, for some time, I have been anxious about you; and I fear some secret care is weighing on you. I do not want to force your confidence, but simply to entreat it."

"I have no secrets, Auntie dear, to tell," answered Lilian, quickly. "If anything worried me that you could help or counsel me in, I would tell you at once—you know I would."

"But, my child, there is something. I have watched you now closely since our last visit to town, and I have seen a change in you. At first I thought it my fancy; but many things, slight in themselves, are yet sufficient to convince me that the little heart is not at ease, as I would have it."

There was a slight pause, and the drooped eyelids quivered, and the little fingers were pressed closer together, as she answered, at length:

"Rather than you should think I had a secret from you, dear Auntie, I will tell you, if you will promise—and I know you will—to ask me no questions beyond what I tell you; that I—no, I cannot tell you: it is too silly to put in words."

"Poor child!" said Mistress Medlicott, kindly patting her shoulder. "I will not press you; only ask one thing — is it the 'old story?'"

"It is a silly dream, Auntie; like a dream, wild and improbable, but one from which I would not wake, unless to have it realised. I never thought it possible it could be; but just lately it has seemed more like it: and that has, perhaps, made me more silly. Do not trouble about me, dear; I am neither ill nor sad: only, sometimes, there comes over me a feeling of the emptiness and disappointments of this life, which——"

"Which is unnatural and morbid in one

so young, Lily, dear," interrupted her aunt. "Life is full of great aims and objects—a school to prepare us for eternity. If here we let the time slip by in vain regrets, in idle wishes, we are unfitting ourselves for the better life beyond—that higher state of existence, wherein all we have well begun here shall be perfected and ennobled. Every sorrow—every anxiety—each disappointment—each lost hope—are but so many lessons to learn; which, if well learnt, help us on our way to that land where no such lessons are needed: 'where we shall be satisfied.' Grand and comprehensive promise! no more vain longings and regrets—no wistful looking back—no anxious looking forward. Oh, my little girl!" she said, with infinite tenderness, as her soft blue eyes filled with tears, "do not waste the precious moments given you here in a dream, however sweet. If it is not to be

realised, your wearying for it will not bring it to pass; and, if it is ordered for you, it will come in due time."

"Yes, Auntie; I know that; and I am ashamed of my own folly—only, it seems so strange, that, when I have almost succeeded in putting it aside, I should—he should—even come here."

"He!" said Auntie, smiling; "yes, we commit so many follies for that little pronoun; but only, darling, try not to indulge in day dreams. 'Thinking is but an idle waste of thought,' was said by a clever man in jest, but it is sometimes true. I knew a girl, who, through a long life, till her death—yes, I may say so—loved one whom she never married; and yet life itself neither lost its purpose or its charm. Her love was her talisman, and she cherished it all her days here, believing in its bright and glorious fulfilment hereafter."

"And she was happy, Auntie?" asked Lilian, with a slight sigh.

"As happy as anyone in this world is meant to be, my dear. Not in the way she would have chosen, but in that ordered for her, which is always best, though we find it so hard to think so."

"Did he marry, or how did she lose him?" again asked Lilian.

"My child, he died."

"Oh! but that was better—so much better to bear. She could still think him her's, and be true to him all her life, and love him without sin."

"Truly; and so she did; but, had he been false to her, with the assistance of that proper pride, which is a woman's best friend, she would have put aside from her thoughts one so unworthy to fill them; for I suppose you are not alluding to the rare and unfortunate case in which a woman gives

her love unasked—unsought," said Mistress Medlicott, pointedly.

"But, if so?" said Lilian, in a very low voice.

"I can scarcely say, my dear. I cannot tell you what she I speak of would have done then, because there was that in her that would have prevented her caring for one who had not shown, at least, a very strong semblance of a love for her. Yes, these cases are *very* rare, I suppose; and, like physical ailments, by their very rarity, they are rendered very difficult to treat, from the lack of experience. The patients themselves can do more than the physicians: they must call in two able assistants—good sense and industry, and the cure will soon be effected. Now, I shall not detain you any longer: I only hope sincerely that there is not one among my children who will make me feel I have ill-fulfilled the

sacred duty I have striven to do, by refusing me their confidence. Very often a grief passes with the telling of it, which is made greater and heavier by concealment."

"Yes—yes, dear Auntie; but are there not thoughts, and fancies, and idle dreams," answered Lilian, rising from her seat, and kneeling down before her aunt, "which are all too silly—too vague to be clothed in words? Such is the folly which I have somehow so ill-concealed, that it has drawn your notice to me; but, believe me, that if you could help me, or counsel or comfort me, I would tell you—indeed I would."

"Then I will ask no more, Lilian; only do not waste your life in idle dreaming:

'Trust no future, howe'er pleasant;
Let the dead past bury its dead;
Act—act—in the living present,
Heart within and God o'erhead.'

—I cannot conclude my sermon in better words."

She kissed her tenderly, and Lilian, rising, walked quietly and silently from the room.

In the Priory grounds, walked Walter Ashleigh and Rupert Carrington, in earnest conversation.

Grace was not back; but she had written a long letter to Walter, telling him that she was happy where she was: happier—except for missing him and Everard—than she was at home; and she did not mind how long she stopped: Mrs. Ambrose was so kind, and the Home was so cheerful and happy. She gave her address, and asked him to write to her often, and come and see her if he could.

"I cannot quite make out the letter," said Walter; "whether she is really happy, or what it means. Grace is such an odd girl. She does not mention my mother, or her

separation from her; and yet, of course, she knows my father's object was to part them."

"Yes; but, from her account of the place, I imagine the poor girl is so pleased with the cheerfulness and brightness which surrounds her, that she has for the time forgotten all else."

"It may be so. How aggravatingly civil and agreeable the gentleman is, is he not? and the wing, you see, is boarded up."

"Oh, yes! he means what he says. Will it lay the ghost?"

"Ah! I was going to tell you. The absurd people—our servants and the villagers—are fuller of it than ever; for still they declare they see the lights, and the figure passing the window."

"Nonsense!"

"They do, indeed. It is not *our* ghost anyhow; and I must think of some plan to

let Grace see her, too, or I believe she will fret herself ill or mad."

"Send your mother your sister's address, and she will manage somehow."

"Yes, I was thinking of doing so to-night."

"What of old Poyntz?" asked Carrington, after a pause; "is he better?"

"Oh, my dear fellow! I forgot to tell you; he has left the place."

"Gone! Where to?" exclaimed Rupert, excitedly.

"I don't know in the least; but if you want to know I can find out. What an interest you seem to take in the old chap."

"Oh, no!—not particularly—at least he is—he rather reminds me of one in whom I did feel an interest once, and so, if you can find out where he is, I shall be glad."

"Well, I daresay I can; I'll ask Dr. Stillwell."

"Thanks; it's rather cold dawdling about here this afternoon; let us go for a walk—down to the meadows, eh?—to see the Beauty," said Rupert, laughing.

"I don't mind; yes, if you like. But we ought to have some excuse for going."

"Let's ask for a day's shooting."

"Good; it will be so much use to me," answered Walter, with a light laugh.

"Well, but you might have a friend staying with you, whom it *would* be of use to. I should like a walk over the turnips before the shooting's over immensely. I've had an invitation down to Sir Archibald Mackey's, but I won't go so far from the poor old Major while he lives, and, besides, I hate going there: his great long daughters make such a set at one."

"I thought you liked tall women."

"So I do—tall graceful women, but not what I call 'long women'—straight up-and-

down sort of creatures. They are always vilely dressed, too, and have a fresh manner for each man, according to what they think his tastes."

"Oh! I know the sort of girl; but, look here, are we really to go to Broderip's?" for they had strolled through the gate, and were walking down the road.

"Oh, yes! let's go; it's something to do. Dolly was right about your father, wasn't she?" he continued, after a pause, during which Walter had lighted his cigar by Rupert's.

"Yes, she knows him well; but I don't understand in the least his object. Everard thinks he has failed in his first purpose, whatever that was, and now pretends it was all a joke. He knows, of course, that we take her and my mother's side, and he thought to get her away, and—pretending to have no hand in it—avoid the necessity of

letting us know where she was; but, I suppose, he suddenly remembered that she would naturally write to us, and the mystery would be at once solved. He never acknowledges, as Everard says, a failure, even to himself; and so he braves it out by saying it was a joke, and—he is so far right, you see—that his anger *was* feigned."

"Curious man, certainly."

"He is, indeed. Another thing that floored him, too, was Everard's excitement about the matter. He little thought he would take it up so warmly, and he's rather afraid of Everard."

"Yes, I daresay he is: the purity and grandeur of a character like Everard's awes him, and forces him to respect it. You know I think a fellow like your brother makes us all sing small: his single-heartedness, his steadiness of purpose, the

wonderful way in which he is in the world but not of it—living his sweet, patient dream-life of contemplation, and with such a gentle sympathy for all about him—astonishes and delights me."

"He's a wonderful fellow, there's no doubt," said Walter. "Poor old man!"

"Yes, she'll be a lucky woman who secures his love," said Rupert.

A spasm, as of pain, passed over Walter's face as he answered, in a forced tone of gaiety:

"That's not on the cards for either of us; we are going to live a bachelor life together."

"I dare say—you look like it."

"Oh! we are, really. You will see."

"Yes, I shall if I live long enough. No, you are not the stuff old bachelors are made of. Sometimes I think I shall be one: I'm so brutally particular."

"Are you? You won't be when the right party comes."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, when one sees one's 'fate' we don't stop to look at the colour of her eyes, or take her measure, or note her temper. She is there—our Queen, our Empress—be she what she may."

Rupert gave a long whistle. "Oh! that's it, is it? What an old bachelor's speech!"

For all answer, Walter pushed him off the path; and, running on before him, jumped over the hedge into the next field, in the same way that Rupert had once done before.

"Where are you going, you donkey, you?" called Rupert.

"Following in your steps, my dear friend. This was the way you once proposed going to Broderip's," answered Walter, peeping over the hedge.

"Nonsense—come over again; I want to

talk to you. I think I should like to live down here, Pop."

"Live down here! why, I thought you hated the country?"

"Well, I thought I did; but, somehow, I like it now, and I was thinking, if the poor old Major died, I should sell out and live somewhere in this neighbourhood. I am fond of all country amusements—all sorts of sport—and it's near enough to London to run up when one wished."

"Yes; but you would be awfully dull. You would have to look up a wife, then."

"I suppose I should. One of the Ladies Murray, eh?"

"Yes, that would suit very well."

"I think not," said Rupert, with sudden gravity.

"Why not?—they'll have no money, and the best thing they could do would be to marry a wealthy commoner."

"Then you had better try your chance, Pop."

"I have just told you that is not to be. Why, Rupe, Everard and I learnt a piece more of our pleasant family history from Aunt Clarinda. I used to ask myself if it were fair to bring a wife to such a father-in-law as ours will be; but this is worse. I think you know most of my troubles, and so you may as well know this;" and he briefly told him the substance of his aunt's communication.

"Well, but, my dear Pop," said Rupert, kindly, "I should not so hastily come to a conclusion, and take vows of celibacy yet. Recollect circumstantial evidence alone condemns him; he may still be proved innocent."

"Too late for such hope, I fear."

"Perhaps by the time you have found the lady," said Rupert, smiling; "for that,

it strikes me, will be a work of time. You are more particular than I am—that is, more fastidious. You never think any women pretty."

"I beg your pardon."

"Oh, yes!—this little Kathleen. Well, if you denied her beauty, I should take out a statute of lunacy against you."

"Beauty is not an essential for a wife, either, in my opinion," answered Walter, without noticing his last speech.

"Think not? Oh! I don't know," said Rupert, doubtingly.

"One great requisite beyond all beauty, to my mind, is companionship. Beauty fades, you know, old fellow."

"True, O King!—still, it must be a charming thing to own a beautiful creature whom all the world is mad about: cherishing it like some rare bit of china or costly gem, knowing everyone to be envying your

possession of it. There she is!" he said, suddenly. They were in sight of the farm; and, standing at the garden gate, feeding some pigeons, stood Kathleen.

She came forward to meet them with a bright smile, two of the pigeons still on her shoulder.

"Do I look anything like Goody Two-shoes?" she asked.

"I should not like so to flatter Miss Margery Meanwell," said Rupert. "If the artist has faithfully portrayed her in the 'Child's Own Book,' I can't say I trace any resemblance."

"I think she does," said Walter, with an almost childish petulance, which made his friend turn and look at him with astonishment; but he quickly recovered himself, and asked after Mr. Broderip, and if he should find him in the yard.

"No, Mr. Ashleigh, my grandfather is

away to-day—over at Ternlea. He will not be home until night; but granny is in-doors, and will be glad to see you. You know she always says you are as welcome as the flowers in May."

"She is very kind to me always. Come in, Rupert, and be introduced to Mrs. Broderip," he said, turning to Carrington, who was stopping before a standard rose-tree, admiring one beautiful bud which was just opening.

"While I go and fetch some of the old tap, eh, Mr. Ashleigh?" said Kathleen, laughing.

They went in to the pretty parlour, where, through the leaves of the yellow jasmine climbing over the lattice, the golden sunshine streamed, and found the old lady dosing in her elbow-chair; but she was glad she said to be so disturbed; and never in any drawing-room had Rupert Carrington

made himself more agreeable. He told her anecdotes—listening with polite attention to those she recounted to him; talked of all that made the great interest of her life—her dairy, her poultry. Walter, sitting silent the while, turned over the leaves of a photograph book, in which there were the strangest-looking persons he had ever seen—principally extraordinarily-fat old ladies and children, with large staring eyes, all apparently residing at the same marine residence; where, from the open window therein, the sea was visible. Kathleen, leaning on her grandmother's chair, her rich, red lips parted by a smile, and her eyes gleaming with merriment, listening to them both, and sometimes joining in—the moments flying by unheeded. Presently Walter took out his watch, and silently showed it to Rupert.

"Oh! rubbish—your watch gallops," he said.

"Right to a moment."

"And I haven't seen the bees which Miss O'Brian promised I should."

"It won't do to-day; we shall be late."

"Oh! sure we'll not be long just seeing the creatures," said Kathleen.

"As you will," answered Walter coldly; "I must go. My father objects to be kept waiting for dinner: you can, of course, please yourself, Carrington."

"You see, Miss O'Brian, the fates are against me. May I inspect the bees another day?"

"Certainly; whenever you like."

"I shall hold it an engagement, then. I wonder if Mr. Broderip would let me walk through the farm and have a pop at the birds?"

"Oh dear, yes! I'm sure he would; but I don't think there are many birds just about on his land."

"Do you think I may come and see to-morrow?" he said, eagerly.

"To-morrow!" interrupted Walter. "Are not you going back to town to-morrow?"

"Not if you will let me stay."

"I must go; you must consult my father and Everard."

"I think they won't turn me out. Well, then, I will come to-morrow in the hope of obtaining Mr. Broderip's consent."

"Do, sir—do," said the old lady; "and, I tell 'ee what—you go a shooting about till you're tired, and come in here and I'll gie ye a hearty lunch—*there!*"

"Thank you so much; and we'll tell some more stories."

"That us will—good day. I shall look forrard to seeing you. Well, that's the nicest spoken young man as ever I see—and handsome, too, bean't he, Katty?" said the old woman, as the door closed on her visitors.

LIBRARY
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

Kathleen was leaning against the window watching them down the garden, and Rupert had turned at the gate and lifted his hat, but Walter never looked back once.

CHAPTER III.

"Do, darling Auntie, say Yes? It will be so delightful! and poor May looks quite white: it is five weeks since she has seen Philip. It will be the last farewell to the sweet summer—and then, we will settle down like dormice for the winter, and in the spring *my* wings will be ready, and I shall flit forth from the nest into the world. Oh! say Yes?"

On her knees before her Aunt—her bright, blue eyes, dancing with excitement, fixed on her face—knelt Gertrude; and Auntie sat smiling, letting the eager words flow on unanswered, till the speaker had exhausted all her eloquence; and then she said, quietly:

"And I am to say 'Yes'? and you are all to go and catch severe colds, to repay me for giving way to you?"

"Oh, no! Auntie; not a bit of it. We will take endless wraps, and come home so early. Look, now, let me write the list of the party I want, and the whole programme. No, no, Ma'mselle," she said, turning quickly, as the door opened and Ma'mselle peeped in, "you really must not disturb me: I am illustrating the quotation which I rendered into German yesterday so beautifully—'To be or not to be;' and it is 'To be,' isn't it, Auntie, dear? Now, give me five minutes more, dear Ma'mselle, and I will come and be so industrious. Auntie, listen!" she said, as Ma'mselle, with a smile and shrug of her shoulders, went away. "We must have Philip to begin with; we must have Mr. Prescott; and the three Ashleighs, if Grace has come home, if not, two; and the dear

old Doctor for *me:* and now, let's see—I want some more girls. Oh! the two Morleys, and the cousin who's staying with them—she's very pretty too. Then, we will have the waggonette, and Lilian's pony-carriage, and Mr. Prescott will, of course, bring the dog-cart, and Philip will have some kind of conveyance: so that will take us all, and food for the party likewise; if not, Stephens can drive the farm-cart with the hampers, can't he?"

"What are you doing?" asked May, entering the room at the moment.

"Trying to persuade me out of my senses, Birdie! Come here, and tell me what you think about it? Gertrude is mad to have a water-party to finish up the summer festivities; and I say it is too late, and you'll all catch cold."

"No, I think that will be very nice, Auntie; I don't think we shall catch cold."

"It will be charming, May; so, now, run away and write to Philip, and tell him to come down on Friday. We must let Walter Ashleigh know in good time, to make his arrangements to get a day at home."

"*Mr.* Ashleigh," said Auntie, with a slight smile, and a stress on the first word.

"Oh, no! we don't want—Oh! I know what you mean," she said, laughing and blushing slightly at her aunt's gentle hint; "but it is such a long ceremony—Mr. Walter Ashleigh, and Mr. Everard Ashleigh."

"It is best, in my opinion, always to say Mr. Ashleigh; and you can explain *which* Mr. Ashleigh, if you are asked. It is a bad style people have lately fallen into, of calling each other by some nickname, or using their two names together, without the dignity of either Mr. or Miss. Were it not for your fortunate title, you would be talked of as Gerty Murray, and your sisters

Lil, Edith, and May Murray. And I am not sure even that I am not as it is, 'Bess Medlicott,'" said she, laughing, in spite of the vexation which this subject frequently aroused in her.

"Oh, Auntie darling!" said May, stooping and kissing her; "I think I should fly at anyone who called you such a name."

"I own I prefer greatly the old-fashioned title, which seems to cling to me, though I think I am not too strongly prejudiced in favour of old fashions: many modern ones are great improvements, I am quite willing to own. I simply regret very much the loss of the old courtesy, which was the distinguishing mark of the English 'lady' and 'gentleman,' and the pure language which they spoke."

Yes—it was true. In the most perfect way, Mistress Medlicott had kept with the times: never crying them down, or regretting

the old days, yet retaining all the courtesy of manner and grace of speech, for which she had just acknowledged her admiration. In short, she had kept all that was good in the past, mingling it with all that was good in the present, so that the effect produced was, a perfect English gentlewoman, such as she anxiously endeavoured to make the young girls under her charge. Without in the least encouraging a foolish narrow-minded pride of their birth, she had urged on their remembrance that *noblesse oblige;* that of those who sit in the high places, more is expected; and that grace of manner and elegance of speech, which are the proper accompaniments of all ladies, should be more especially noticed in those of noble birth: and she had succeeded so well, by her precept and example, that though Gertrude, with her love of fun and mischief—the thoughtless gaiety of her

youth—sometimes stepped over the line prescribed by Auntie, they were all cited as models for the other girls of their acquaintances; and the description given of them by an old nobleman—that they were "clever without pedantry, graceful without affectation, witty without impertinence, merry without vulgarity"—was quoted by the mothers, with many injunctions to their daughters to try and do likewise.

Having succeeded in gaining her object with Auntie, Gertrude started off to the study, where Ma'mselle was patiently awaiting her.

"Now, I'm going to work so hard, Cherie," she said, using the pet name she adopted when she wished to curry special favour with her governess; and, for a little while, she did work with tolerable steadiness. At length the pen stopped, and the "unruly member," which she had such difficulty

always to restrain, could be kept in check no longer.

"What ridiculous questions these are, Ma'mselle. How am I to know what attitude the Emperor assumed towards France? I don't know whether he stood on one leg or two, or—do you think it was anything like this?" and she handed across the table a sketch of a man, dressed in the fashion of the day, with a crown on his head, pirouetting like a ballet dancer, with one hand extended, in a suggestive manner, towards his nose.

"Ah! *mais fi donc!*" began Ma'mselle, trying not to smile at her wayward pupil;—"and you promised to work."

"Well, really, I have. See now—I have answered all but this one, really; and in perfect French. Now, we'll put them away, and have a nice long read of 'Undine.'"

"Ah! but I must have the rest complete by to-morrow. See how long time you have been just doing that leetle."

"I'll finish them whilst they're at dinner —honour and true."

"*Eh bien!*—then I depends on you."

And so the work proceeded with tolerable steadiness until the entrance of Edith and Lilian, who had been into the village.

Of course they had to hear what success had attended the projected water-party, and then to be duly questioned as to what they had seen, done, and said in the village.

"Well, we met several people," said Edith; "the dear old Doctor, Kathleen O'Brian, and, walking beside her, talking to her—who do you think?—Captain Carrington. They parted at the Alms Houses —and he lifted his hat to her, as if she had been a duchess."

"Well, why shouldn't he? He's a gentle-

man, and respects the sex — not its distinctive titles. Quite right, wasn't he, Lil? —Is Lilian gone? I never saw her go," said Gertrude.

"Yes; it's Lilian's principle to go immediately and take off her things the moment she comes in. I'm obliged to sink into a chair, and recover myself first."

"Well, go on telling me—did Kathleen look lovely?"

"Yes—very well."

"And the Captain?—why he's always down here now. Perhaps he'll be able to come to the party: that will be exquisite. I wonder how he came to know Kathleen? Go on, Edie—tell me some more."

Edith was playing with the feather of her hat, which she held in her hand, and seemed as if she were not listening, but thinking. Again her sister repeated her request.

"Oh! I've nothing more to tell. What

an inquisitive thing you are!" she said, petulantly. "Go on with your lessons."

"No; but do just tell me this one thing: Did the Captain speak to you?"

"Took his hat off, and said, 'Good morning.'"

"Oh! how slow. Why did you not make him talk?"

"Absurd child! We were not going to stop and chat in the street to a man we've seen once in our lives."

"Oh!—Well, is there any news in the village?"

"None, that I'm aware of—oh, yes! Miss Lambton, the school mistress, is very ill."

"La! bless me! how unlucky we are; first the school master, and then the school mistress. Who's keeping school?"

"She got through her work to-day, I believe; but they think they must shut to-morrow."

"Dear—dear! How sad for the children!"

"For the parents, you mean. I met Mr. Beamish, the curate, and offered to keep school myself, if the rector liked, rather than shut it."

"You didn't, Edith? How ridiculous!"

"Ridiculous!—why? I should prefer the boys' school, certainly; but I should like either. The meek little man looked very much astonished; but said he would mention it to the rector: and Lilian declares that he took it as a personal compliment to himself."

"I dare say he did. I have told you for long he has been wasting away into a hopeless affection for you. There'll be no seeing him edge-ways soon. He is the exact picture of the naughty little boy who wouldn't eat his soup."

"Be quiet—do, Gertrude! and go on

working. I shall go;" and Edith sauntered out of the room and up to her own. Lilian had by this time taken off her walking things, and was leaning out of the open window of the sitting-room, pulling pieces of the jasmine that grew round it, and making them up in little bouquets; but not as though the fragrant flower were at all in her thoughts. In her deep blue eyes there was a far-off, dreamy look; and, as her sister entered, she turned, and, with a heightened colour, threw down the flowers on the table, and said:

"Why, Edith, what an age you have been! what have you been doing?"

"Oh! that chattering little monkey kept me for the news; and my wearied limbs required repose. Odd that Captain Carrington is so often down here, isn't it?" she said, as she entered the room after slowly dismantling herself of her walking

things. "What's the attraction?—the village belle?'

"Perhaps."

"Lilian," said Edith, after a pause, "if I can, may I guess your secret; and will you tell me if I am right?"

"Your pertinacity, Edith, might tempt me to an untruth," she answered, with a half-smile. "Why press me so hard? If, by telling you, I could help myself, or, still better, serve you, I would tell you—much as I dislike it; but it can do neither."

"I wish I had never known you had a secret: it is the most aggravating thing in the world, to have a perpetual mystery going on in the house."

"But, dear Edith, it is so private—so utterly uninteresting to anyone but myself—that I cannot see why it should disturb you."

"Answer me one question, and I faith-

fully promise to ask you no more: Does it concern——"

"Lilian!—Lilian! Is Lilian here?"

"Yes, May, dear. What's the matter?" she said, stepping forward to meet her sister, who, with a flushed face and eager haste, had entered the room.

"The second post in, and not one line! It is too bad. I'll write to him and break it off—that I will! Much he loves me to worry me like this;" and, throwing herself on the couch, with her face buried in its cushion, May burst into tears.

"What *is* all this fuss about?" said Edith, coolly.

"May has been expecting a letter from Philip, which has not arrived," said Lilian, as she took May's hand between her own, and held it gently; "but there will be such a nice long one to-morrow, that she will be

glad of the delay which needed such sweet contrition."

"Oh! is that all?" answered Edith. "I should be so grateful to him when he didn't write: I shouldn't have the trouble of answering. If I'm ever engaged, it shall be to someone next-door, that I can nod out of window to every morning; and the engagement shall be very short, for I couldn't do that every day for long, especially if I felt obliged to do it."

"You don't know what it is to love, and be anxious about anyone, Edith," said May, passionately, through her sobs; "you love no one but yourself."

"No, dear, I know: it saves such a world of trouble. That concentration of affection on one object, who is never absent from you, of whom you can never be jealous, and with whom you can never disagree, is perfectly delightful."

"I know I wish I'd never seen Philip," said poor May, "that I do."

"But, dear May," said Lilian, gently, "it is only two days since he wrote."

"*Only* two days, Lilian! Why, Ida Somerton has a letter every day—and sometimes twice a day — from Mr. Bentham!"

"I think Mr. Bentham must be a very idle man, then, dear. Surely you would not wish your Philip to waste his time in assuring you of the love which you know well is your own?"

"But I like him to tell me of it over and over again," answered May, lifting her face with a pretty piteousness to her sister's.

"Baby!" said Edith; and, as if such folly was too painful longer to witness, she sailed out of the room.

"Besides," continued May, unheeding the

interruption, "I am afraid he is ill, because he promised to write every day."

"And Auntie advised him not to promise. It would have been wiser to have heeded her advice, and saved so much anxiety," said Lilian. "Now, look here. Sit down at once, and write him three lines: telling him of our proposed picnic, and saying you are anxious at not hearing from him—that will bring an immediate reply. After that, I should advise you to give up the daily writing: only bidding him write as often as he can."

"What am I to say about the picnic? What day is it to be?" said May, slowly rising from the couch, in obedience to her sister's suggestion.

"Well, Monday or Tuesday; but tell him to come down on Friday or Saturday. And shall I write too, May, and say how someone has been spoiling his pretty

diamonds by washing them with salt water?"

"No; I shall tell him myself that he has given me a headache, and is unkind, and does not love me."

"No, no! I would not write angrily, May, dear: 'To be wrath with those we love doth work like madness i' the brain.' You will wish your letter back, dear, the moment it is in the post, if you say one word of anger in it. Don't, May darling."

"Why, Lily, one would think you cared for him yourself, you are so anxious about his feelings."

"Not *his*, love—*yours*," said Lilian, gently. "I know you would be so sad if you allowed yourself to be angry with Philip: sorrow comes to us fast enough, we need not go to meet it. Now I shall leave you in peace to write. Give him my love, and tell him to be sure to come."

And Lilian went down the broad staircase, slowly and thoughtfully, meeting Gertrude flying up to find her, with some fresh idea about the water party, which was filling her mind to the exclusion of all else.

CHAPTER IV.

In the large, comfortable room in the Priory, dedicated to the use of Dolly Masham, yclept the housekeeper's room, sat Dolly herself before a table, on which were ranged some dozens of gallipots, filled with preserves, which she was tying down and affixing labels to, bearing the names of the different fruits contained in them. By her side stood Walter Ashleigh, with his little Skye terrier putting up beseeching paws for a further supply of pieces of bread dipped in the jam, which Walter had been for some time dropping into her mouth.

"Don't, Master Walter," cried Dolly, "you'll make the dog sick; and you'd make

a better door than a window, too," she said, giving him a little push.

"What do you mean? Am I in your light?" he said, laughing.

"Yes; you've got so accustomed to stand in your own, I suppose, that you forgot how inconvenient it is, eh, Master Walter? But now, look here—light the other gas for me, there's a good young gentleman; I can't see with this side light. I shall be labelling the black-currant jam with the cherry label; and wouldn't you call me everything but Dolly, if you had the luck to open it?"

"Very likely, Mrs. Masham," he answered, doing at once what she asked.

"Very unlikely, 'Mrs. Masham,' or anything so polite: thick head, duffer, muff, and a lot of them pretty little pet names you know. I say, I'm glad you've come in to have a chat, though, for I do want to tell

you that, really and truly, the lights are still to be seen in that wing. Not every night, but very often; generally between ten and eleven—when we're in at prayers. Whoever's turn it is to stop out vows they see 'em—and I'm certain I did, last night. Now it's been bricked up, I don't see how any human creature can get in."

"No, nor I; it's fancy, Dolly."

"No such thing. I wish you could see them; and you'd believe it."

"Have you mentioned it to my father?"

"No: what would be the use? He'd wave me off, and desire me not to give way to superstitious folly, unworthy of my sense. He always huffs me off with a compliment, you know."

"But the shutters are closed—how can you see lights?"

"Through the holes at the top, of course."

"Oh, Dolly!"

"Well, I don't care: seeing's believing; and if you like to come and sit here some night, you'll see them yourself."

"Well, I will; and if I do see them, I shall make my father have the boards taken down, the place searched, and a man put to watch all night. I say, what are you going to give us to take to the picnic?"

"Oh! I don't know: snips and snails, and puppy dogs' tails. When is it to be?"

"Tuesday, I think."

"Then I'd better begin, and get the horehound tea."

"The 'how much?'"

"The horehound tea. You'll all catch cold, and Mr. Everard will favour the company with his winter cough, in his best style."

"His barcarole, I suppose."

"Barcarole! I never heard tell of that. Baker's roll I know."

"It's a very fine joke, Dolly, if you could but see it."

"Just as fine if I can't, I suppose."

"Well, yes. Your density does not destroy my brilliancy, certainly; but, I suppose, I must return to the society of my amiable parent. Dolly," he said, coming back again, before he had got as far as the door, "did Captain Carrington —did you see much of him while he was here?"

"No; I'm sorry to say I didn't. He used to go out so early shooting, and come home so tired that he had a bath and went to bed. It wasn't carrying the game home that tired him; I never saw a single head—Stop! look there now—now, can't you see a light?" she said, eagerly pointing out of the window; for Walter had not drawn the blind down when he lighted the gas, and against the clear sky, in which

the stars were shining, the west wing stood out in strong relief. As she spoke, the stable clock struck ten.

"There," said Dolly, "I told you so: it's always about prayer time. Yes, there goes the bell."

"Unusually early, though," said Walter, who had been standing watching the place, from which certainly he found he could see a streak of light. "Go in to prayers, all of you: I will stay and watch. If he asks for me, say I am not coming in to-night, and I'll speak to him afterwards."

In the library at the Manor House, that same evening, sat the Lady May Murray and Philip, Duke of Claverton. She is on a low chair, near the conservatory; several large roses in her lap, which she seems just to have gathered, and which she appears to be going to arrange in a rustic basket, filled with ferns, beside her. The

Duke is on a couch at the other end of the room, apparently engaged with some optical delusion occasioned by the rapid twisting of his watch chain.

They have not spoken for some time. At length he rises, and going to her, says :

"May, say you did not mean that ?"

"I will not say what is not true. I *did* mean it."

He bent down over her, his hand grasping the back of the chair so tightly that his nails were white with the pressure.

"You meant," he said, slowly, and his face and even lips grew white as he spoke, "you meant that I do not love you ; that I have told you so in mockery, to laugh at you ; and that some other dearer claims my time and thought. You mean this, May ?—those were the words you uttered ? In pity, say it was anger—passion—and you knew not *what* you said."

"I tell you again, Duke," said May, snatching away the hand that he had seized, "that I did mean it; that you cannot love me as I would be loved if it is irksome to write to me—wearisome to be with me—and, that any place on earth has more charm for you than where I am——"

"May, be reasonable," he said, making an effort to be calm; "I have tried to explain about the letters—and, as you gave me such short notice for this picnic, I was engaged. It is a dinner invitation—of a fortnight's standing. How can I throw it up?"

"Choose, pray, between me and a dinner. The latter will surely gain the preference."

"May, you are unjust. It is my turn to reproach you with want of love. I think you must be judging me by yourself; and if this is a foreshadowing of what our life is to be, let us at once break an engagement,

which has lost the only true basis which can ensure its happiness—perfect confidence and trust in one another."

He had turned away from her, and was pacing rapidly up and down the room, tossing back his hair with the old impetuous action natural to him under any excitement, and speaking with a thick, rapid utterance, his cheeks and lips pale as death; but she sat still, twirling the roses in her hand, never looking at him till his speech ended; and then she said, rising from her seat, and holding one hand tight to her chest, as though to hold still the violent beating of her heart, clenching the beautiful blossoms with the other, as though they could give her the support she needed to stand firm before him:

"It is *my* turn to ask—do *you* mean what you say?"

"I do, May—I do. If I am to be sub-

jected to unjust suspicion—compelled to give a minute account of my every action, of every moment of my time—obliged to cut every friend I have, and spend my life in sickly sentimentality, or be accused of want of love for you—it is better at once to put an end to a marriage, which can bring no happiness to either of us, before it is too late, May, for us to discover our mistake: 'Perfect love casts out fear.' If you cannot trust me out of your sight, you cannot love me; and if, May, thus early in our fancied happiness, such a scene is to be enacted, it gives poor promise for the future."

"Then I am to understand that we part," gasped May, trying in vain to speak calmly.

"Yes—at once; 'tis better so. And you—you can easily forget the momentary folly, in which you accepted one in whose honour

you had no faith, and in whose love you had no belief?"

"Yes—*very* easily—very."

She moved to the door; he had gone to the window, and was standing with his back to her. As she turned the handle, he looked quickly round, and made a few steps towards her.

"Good-bye, Philip."

In what a sad, sad voice the simple words were uttered: the ring of hope and joy had left it. He flew forward; but, dashing the roses on the ground she had held so firmly in her grasp, she covered her hands, and with a sharp cry she could no longer control, she rushed from the room. He took up the roses, and, pressing them to his lips, he thrust them into his bosom; and then, ringing the bell, he asked the servant to inquire if Mistress Medlicott could grant him a few minutes' conversation.

In a few moments she was with him.

"Philip, what is it?—what is wrong?"

One glance at his altered face was enough. All its brightness—its gladness was gone; and, in a voice which trembled with emotion, he said, taking her hand with reverent tenderness between his own:

"I am so sorry to worry you, as I know I shall—it is all over between May and me."

"My boy—what DO you mean?"

"She has thrown me over, because I cannot stay for the water party!" and he laughed a little bitter laugh, leaving go her hand, and beginning again his restless pacing of the room.

"Nonsense, Philip! impossible! My child could not be so silly!"

"Indeed—indeed, it is true. Sit down, and let me tell you all I can of this most wretched affair. I promised to write

every day; and I did, until a press of business came on me. I had to run down into the country about some alterations I wanted made in the castle—I might have saved myself the trouble," he said, bitterly; "they were for *her*—and I was too late for the post. I have only missed twice since our engagement; and, a fortnight ago, I accepted an invitation to dinner for the day on which May has unhappily fixed the water-party. For these foolish reasons, she attacked me fiercely, with complaints and reproaches, and—still worse—with accusations of being false to her! False to her!—my idol!—whose bright, sweet face has lived in my heart since I first looked on it; for whom I would gladly have resigned my dukedom, if I could have purchased by it one joy for her; for whom I would have laid down my life, if she had needed it!—it is too hard!"

Mistress Medlicott had listened calmly and silently to every word of his excited speech. At its close, she said:

"My dear Philip, I am more sorry than I can say, for this folly—I can call it no other name—but, depend on it, the silly child is by this time heartily sorry, and ready to tell you so—let me go and see?"

"No, Mistress Medlicott; it is better not—my mind is made up: I cannot bear this torture twice. If, for such a foolish reason, she could say the bitter things she has, I should live in fear of the same thing again. My poor dear mother's last words of advice to me were: 'When you think of marrying, Philip, mind your wife has the one great requisite for a happy home—good temper. Be sure that if you are continually wrangling before marriage, you will never have any peace after.' I feel sure she was right."

"I feel so, too," said Mistress Medlicott, sadly; "in the care of my darling girls I honestly own my poor May's irritable and exacting temper has been a great anxiety to me; and, much as I shall sorrow over this rupture of a marriage, which would have so pleased me, still I shall hope that it may be a useful lesson to her for life. What do you purpose doing?—These unfortunate occurrences make a great scandal."

"I have thought of that even as I have sat here in all my misery," he said. "I would spare her every shade of annoyance; therefore, if you will permit me, I will remain here, as I intended, until Monday. I shall then make arrangements to leave England; and no one need be aware that any rupture of our engagement has taken place, beyond our family. Our marriage was not fixed, nor had the engagement been made public. Those who know it can be put

off with some excuse, and the matter will be forgotten when—when the Lady May Murray is engaged again, more happily."

"Thank you, Duke, for your consideration," said Mistress Medlicott, rising. "I do not suppose Lady May will come down again to-day; but I shall desire that she will join the family to-morrow, so as to aid you in your laudable desire to prevent this unhappy circumstance becoming the talk of the servants' hall. I will go to her now. I shall see your Grace again at dinner," and, with a slight inclination of her head, she walked away, with an air of mingled sorrow and dignity; and Philip, pressing his hand to his head, as though to hold it from bursting, for the large veins stood out on his forehead like cords, rushed out through the conservatory into the fast fading light of the autumn evening; and Auntie stole quietly into the room, where,

on her bed, sobbing out her passion and her grief, lay the child who had given her the most trouble, and yet whom she loved—she could not but own—the best, and on whose account—in spite of her better judgment—she was angry and hurt with him for whom those bitter tears were being shed.

CHAPTER V.

"Is Mr. Everard gone back to his room, Dolly?" said Walter, who had kept his post at the window during her absence, watching the mysterious light.

"Yes; do you see it still?"

"I see a glimmer, certainly. It's a very small light—a farthing rush-light, I should think. The ghost is evidently not a man of property, and don't stand himself wax candles for his midnight peregrinations."

"Oh! I'm bothered if I can make it out at all," said Dolly; "what will you do?"

"Go and consult the wise man. You put out the gas, and all go to bed but James—I'll tell him to keep up in his own room, and I'll

whistle if I want him, for I think Everard will agree with me, that we'd better reconnoitre."

"All right; take care of yourselves. I say, Master Walter, let me know you're both in safe," she said, calling him back when he had reached the door; "you can thump at my door as you go past."

"You old goose!" said Walter, with a kindly smile, patting her on the shoulder; "we'll make such a row at your door, you'll wish you hadn't asked us!"

"No, I shan't. God bless 'em," she murmured, as he closed the door, "they're as bad as motherless, poor lads! and, Heaven knows, they'd better be fatherless!"

Everard had agreed at once with Walter, that a prompt investigation into the mysterious light was the proper thing to be done; so they both, after giving their instructions to James, went out through the

garden door into the grounds, to that part on which the wing abutted.

"You know, Everard," said Walter, "if there is a light there, there must be someone with it; and the thing is, how did they get in?"

"Well, I see no light," said Everard, as they neared the building.

"No more do I, now; but, on my honour, Everard, when I came out of the housekeeper's room, I could distinctly see a faint light — very faint, like that given by a night-lamp. Stay!—hush!" he said, seizing his brother's arm, "look there! who's that?"

A figure was certainly moving slowly among the trees in the orchard, holding something in its hand, and seemingly groping, as if in search of some lost article, among the grass. The brothers stood watching a moment, and then Walter coughed loudly;

and the figure started, and turned full on them the light of a dark lantern.

"Who is it? and what are you doing here?" said Walter, advancing towards him. "By what right are you in these grounds?"

"The right of ownership, my vigilant son," said Mr. Ashleigh. "Come and help me find my seal, which I have dropped somehow here?"

"It will be like looking for a needle in a bottle of hay, sir, in this long grass."

"Well, yes; I suppose we must give it up to-night."

"Better have the grass mown, sir, in the morning?" suggested Everard.

"No, no; certainly not," said Mr. Ashleigh, sharply; "I shall have Bonner's sheep to bite it down in a day or two. I came out here," he said, more graciously, "to try and find out whether it was an

optical delusion about this light our people declare they still see here. Boorman vows he sees it now; and I thought a sensible man like him could scarcely give way to superstition; but he says, last night, when he went to shut up the houses, there was certainly a light at this near window."

"So there was to-night, sir," answered Walter, coolly; "I saw it myself, and we have come out with a determination to find out what it is."

"Well, I hope you'll succeed; for I own it puzzles me. There is no light there now, is there? Come, now, my thoughtful, scientific son, can you give us no solution of this mystery—something about refraction, or concentration, or luminous gases?"

"No, sir; it is beyond the reach of science," said Everard; "or rather, more likely perhaps, it has not attained such a height. The solution, no doubt, is very

simple : some person or persons, for reasons of their own, go into those rooms at stated intervals, carrying a light."

"But how ?—how, boy ?" said his father, sharply. "Have I not, to put a stop to all this absurdity, had the place boarded up ? where could some person or persons enter ?"

"That is what I purpose making it my business to find out. My reason rejects the probability of a supernatural visitant, although my faith does not deny its *possibility ;* but I should like to be convinced one way or the other."

"Exactly ; let us, therefore, watch for another two hours, and continue our vigilance for some few nights, shall we ?" said Mr. Ashleigh.

"Yes ; and the first time we see the light," said Walter, "go at once, and, pulling down the boarding, enter and search the rooms. Let us get Broadly, the constable, to

watch with us; for I have no hesitation in saying it is no ghostly visitant, and that I should greatly enjoy punishing the very substantial person who is giving us so much trouble."

"By all means, if you think it is advisable and worth the bother; but, under the circumstances, as I have no belief in the story, with the able assistance of Broadly, you cannot want me, so I shall take myself off to bed. You can send James down for Broadly now, if you like."

"I think it is scarcely worth while to-night, myself," said Everard; "we will let him know to come here to-morrow. I do not think the lights will appear again to-night."

"No, no, Everard, the whole is fancy," said Mr. Ashleigh; "let us go in. I am sorry I have lost my seal."

"Shall we hunt again?"

"Oh dear, no! we shall succeed in finding

only a cold—this long grass is very damp. Come along, boys."

Everard whispered something to his brother, and they followed their father back into the house; the two brothers went to Everard's room, and sat up till a very late hour, talking, Walter having, as he passed Dolly's door, tapped very quietly, and opening it a little way, said:

"We're all right, old lady; good-night."

"Good-night, there's good boys," Dolly had answered. "Go on to bed and shut your eyes, as fast as you can lay your legs to the ground!"

"What did Rupert go away for last night, Everard?" said Walter, after they had talked for some time on other engrossing subjects.

"I don't know more than the reason he assigned: that he was anxious to know how his uncle was that he should stay with him

to-day and Sunday, and come down again on Monday if we would have him—and I said Yes, of course; I know you like him."

"I do; but if he goes up to town the day before I come down, and comes down the day I go up, I do not see much advantage I derive from his society."

"True," said Everard, laughing; "but he said, if his uncle was no worse, he should stay till next Monday, and then you will see him, you know."

"Yes; and I shall be down on Monday for this water-party: Rupert can go—that will be famous. I wish I could knock up a match with him and one of the Murrays!" he said, with sudden animation.

"Yes; they are charming girls; but I think Rupert is fascinated with the Village Beauty."

"Nonsense, Everard!—I mean very likely.

But who would think of marrying a girl like that, only for her pretty face—the grandchild of a small farmer?"

"But is she not very superior? so Rupert says."

"Did he amuse you with incessant talk of her?"

"Well, I must say the theme was very often on his lips; he says she sings and writes poetry: in short, she is a *rara avis!*"

"Humph! Good-night, old man; I'm going to turn in."

"Do; we may be very late to-morrow—although my private opinion is, the lights will not be seen again for some time—good-night."

The Sunday morning dawned cold and chill, as the hearts of two inhabitants of the Manor. A high wind was shaking down the leaves from the oaks in the avenue, and shaking the fragrant petals from the autumn

roses. It looked, as Auntie said, anything but hopeful for Tuesday. She had had a long and serious conversation with May, and had induced her to see the propriety of coming downstairs, and endeavouring, as far as possible, to prevent the appearance of anything amiss; but the Duke's haggard face and altered manner, and her swollen eyes, were enough to cause his Grace's man and my Lady's maid to compare notes, and carry the interesting intelligence to the servants' hall that the lovers had had a quarrel.

Nothing could exceed the tenderness of the sisters to the poor child who was thus bitterly rueing the temper she had been warned so often to control; but Gertrude was inconsolable, and the most unreasonable: it was too dreadful; and Philip was a brute—that he was; and yet, of course it served May quite right. The idea of flying at him

like that for nothing! but then — poor little dear!—she was so disappointed she did not know what she said. "No more should I," she continued; "I'm sure I should have flown at him frightfully!—but then I should have forgiven him, after I'd called him every name under the sun."

"Don't be so silly, child," said Edith, with whom she was having this conversation; "forgive a man for calling him names! it strikes me he'd have to forgive you, which he might not feel inclined to do."

"Oh! but I should never have rested till he had. I should just have told him that if we were going to pass our lives together, we should both, probably, in our turns, have much to forgive—and the sooner we began practising, the better; and then, I should have stopped his mouth with kisses, and it

would have been all right, and no one would have been any wiser; and we shouldn't have gone and made everybody miserable, as these two silly things have—I declare I never did feel so wretched. I shall be starved before I come back from church, for I could not eat any breakfast; and did you ever see anything so absurd as Philip looked, trying to do the agreeable, and talking without knowing the least what he was saying? I could have laughed and cried both together; and poor, sweet May looks so lovely and so sad, I wonder he can resist her; and I don't believe he will—before the day's out, they'll make it up."

"May will be very stupid if she does," said Edith; "the idea of being taken up and put down at any man's pleasure!—Oh, good gracious! I'll take good care I never put myself in such a predicament. But come, do make haste; we shall be late.

Ma'mselle and Lilian are going, and Auntie is going to stay with May. I don't know what his Grace is going to do."

"I should think he was in no mood for church."

No; the moment the wretched breakfast was ended, the poor Duke, saying his head ached, and he thought a long walk would do him good, went out, begging they would not wait luncheon for him; and May lay on the sofa in the girls sitting-room, her eyes filling with the tears that, spite of all her efforts, she could not restrain, as the thought of her lost happiness —the wreck of the bright future she had pictured—recurred to her.

Mistress Medlicott sat beside her, occasionally reading a few lines to her, but not expecting her to keep her attention to any lengthened reading, always gently and kindly talking to her on the subject upper-

most in her thoughts, whenever she recurred to it.

"My child," she said, in answer to a passionate outbreak from May of contrition and despair, "it is to me a subject of intense gratitude, when the punishment of our folly falls on us *here*, and in such wise as to make us see its gracious purpose, if this most severe one—and I admit it is so—shall cure that infirmity of temper, that readiness to take offence, which has been such a snare to you—it will, indeed, like many of our trials, be a blessing in disguise."

"I shall never be happy again," sobbed poor May.

"My child, you are young, and this is your first sorrow—it seems so bitter. If you never know a worse, your life will be bright indeed. I cannot but hope this storm will blow over."

"No—no; it never will. He has cast

me off—and I cannot say I am sorry now, or he would think I wanted him to renew our engagement. No, it is all over; and I have nothing more to do on earth, but to long for the end."

Mistress Medlicott made no answer to this. With that intense sympathy of her nature, which made her such a suitable guardian of the young, she felt with them in their sorrows and their joys; and though, with the experience of her age, she knew how time heals all wounds, especially those inflicted on the young, she could realize the despair which filled the heart of poor May, and understand the terrible fight going on between her love and her pride; but she would not bore her with counsel, only wait with that strong faith which had been her own support so many years, believing that what was ordered for her dear child would be the best for her, whatever it might be.

The day wore away slowly until half-past seven, when the Duke had gone to his room after his long walk, and did not make his appearance until the butler had announced that dinner was served, which meal was not in the slightest degree more cheerful than the breakfast had been, save that the company of Dr. Stillwell, who always dined at the Manor House on Sunday, took away a little of the embarassment; as he, perfectly ignorant of anything being amiss, kept up the conversation, and even succeeded in interesting the Duke with some anecdotes of eminent men of the last century, with many of whom his family had been personally acquainted.

When the ladies went into the drawing-room, May, whose eyes kept occasionally filling with tears, in spite of all her efforts, begged Lilian to play all the evening, and then there would be no necessity to talk.

"Poor pet," said Lilian, kissing her, "we will all do our best; and you can slip away early to bed, without the ceremony of good-night."

"He's going away in the morning, Lil; I must look at him as long as I can," she said, with the touching child-like piteousness she had spoken in ever since; "but I cannot talk: I should like music to go on all the evening, only *he* must not sing, Lily—I could *not* bear that."

"My dear one, he would not be able himself to do so, I am sure."

"May, love," said Mistress Medlicott, who had been looking into a buhl cabinet at the other end of the room, "can you arrange these gems for me? They have all, somehow or other, got in the wrong places."

"Yes, Auntie, dear;" and she carried them to a small table near the large windows that opened on the lawn. The

blind was only partially down, for Mistress Medlicott loved to see the moon on the lawn; and this night, after the chill, windy day, it was shining brilliantly.

"Can you see there, May, dear?" asked Gertrude. "Shall I light these candles?"

"No; I can see, dear, beautifully, thank you."

"Have this chair, May," said Edith, rising from a particularly commodious seat near the table, into which she established herself with a book.

"Oh, no! thank you, Edith, darling; I will not disturb you."

"No; here's a delicious chair," said Gertrude, "that will just suit May. You keep your own."

They were all so anxious to do anything for her—the simplest service—to express their sorrow and their sympathy; and her gentleness—the loss of the joy and bright-

ness, that was before the chief beauty of her face—touched them all, and made them vie with one another in acts of love and attention.

She did not see the Duke come into the room; but she felt he was there, and bent her head low down over the cameos. Lilian began at once Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata." Dr. Stillwell drew a chair near Mistress Medlicott. Gertrude hovered about from one chair to another, in a little restless, excited way. Edith, who had gladly gone back among the cushions in her chair, glad to be excused making the great sacrifice she intended, busied herself in her book; and the Duke, after a glance towards May, went to a seat near the piano, and sat with his face buried in his hands—the long white fingers thrust through his thick dark hair—not listening to the sweet strains, but thinking of the music of a voice for ever lost

to him—of the sweet words and looks of love which had been so dear to him, longing to go to her now, and say: "Be mine once more—let this wretchedness end for both of us." But his pride—the doubt of her really loving him—the fear of a future life of constant misunderstandings—held him back; and he longed for the ending of a day which had been the bitterest he had ever passed in his life. He would start in the morning before there was a chance of seeing her; for that, he knew, would be more than he could bear.

And she sat with trembling fingers and aching heart, wishing, too, that her pride would let her rush to him, and say: "Forgive me, Philip; I was foolish—mad! I will never do so again."

And so the evening passed; and the Duke, raising his head occasionally when any movement was made in the room,

saw how the girls hovered about May, and tended her so gently and lovingly. At length, Dr. Stillwell took his leave, and Mistress Medlicott rang for the candles. What should he do ?—Say good-bye to them all at once ?—tell them he was going to start early, and should not see them in the morning ? Yes ; that was best.

May had risen from her seat, and was putting away the gems in the cabinet. He went to Mistress Medlicott, and, in a trembling voice, said :

"I had better say good-bye now. I am going very early in the morning."

"Oh ! certainly, your Grace. I will order breakfast to be ready for you."

"Thank you. Good-bye," he said to Edith, who had risen too.

"Good-bye, Duke. How considerate you are not to expect us to get up at an un-

earthly hour to see you off," she said, with a feeble attempt at pleasantry.

"I should be sorry to disturb anyone," he answered.

"Courage, May!" whispered Lilian, who had gone quietly beside her; for she saw that she was rocking to and fro, her fingers pressed on the table to support her.

He walked towards them, then turned, and said, hastily:

"Where is Lady Gertrude?"

"She is gone to bed," answered Lilian. Lilian had noticed that, at his first speech to Mistress Medlicott, Gertrude's face had grown scarlet, and she had rushed from the room.

"Will you say good-bye to her for me?" he asked; "and tell her I will bring her some flowers from Switzerland—if I ever come back."

Lilian shook his hand silently, and, moving away, left him to speak his farewell to May;

but words failed him. He stood for a second watching the trembling girl, whose white face almost terrified him. One word from her—the "Stay, Philip!" which was in her heart—would have won him back for ever. But she could not utter it—never a word fell from the parched lips; but he seized her hand, held it in his own, with an almost painful grasp, and, in broken accents, murmured:

"God bless and keep you always."

They knew not, any of them, how he left the room, for all eyes were fixed on May, as she tried to move a step forward, and then fell heavily to the ground.

"What is the matter?" asked the Duke, opening his door, a few moments after, as hurried footsteps kept passing and re-passing.

"Lady May has fainted, your Grace," answered a servant; "and they can't get her to."

"Can I be of any use—fetch any one—do anything?" he asked, eagerly.

Another door opened at the moment, and Lilian came out. He sprang forward and repeated his question.

"No, thank you," she answered, calmly; "she is gradually recovering consciousness, and only requires a good night's rest. Perhaps you will kindly be very quiet in the morning—we shall like her to sleep as long as possible."

"Depend on me, Lilian," he said, resuming the old familiarity. "Can I know, any way, how she is before I leave?"

"Yes; my maid shall see your servant. Good night."

"Thank you—bless you!" He returned to his room—but not to sleep. Through the hours of that wretched night he wrote and re-wrote a letter he had made up his mind to leave for May. At dawn he tried to sleep,

but only an unrefreshing slumber came to him, in which he dreamed of fearful peril to May, from which he in vain tried to save her; and when his man knocked at his door, he was glad to be roused from such dreams, though he felt they were but little worse than the sad reality.

"Take this to Lady May's maid," he said, handing him the letter; "and find out how her Ladyship is this morning."

"Yes, your Grace. I don't think Mrs. Briggs is down yet; I have not seen her."

"I must know, somehow, before I leave. What time have I got?"

"An hour and a-half to the train, your Grace."

"Very well; go and find out the news as soon as possible."

His servant was waiting for him in the dining-room, where his breakfast was laid for him.

"I cannot see Mrs. Briggs, your Grace; she is still in her Ladyship's room, and no one is allowed to go in; but I have seen Mistress Medlicott's maid, and she says that her Ladyship passed a very restless night, but has been sleeping since five o'clock. Am I to give the letter to anyone, sir, or only to Mrs. Briggs?"

"Any one who will take it promptly, either to the Lady May herself, or Lady Lilian."

The carriage which was to convey him to the station stood at the door, and from one of the windows peeped Gertrude's tearful face, watching. Through the mist of tears, she saw him come slowly down the steps—not at his old, light, rapid pace; with no merry jests to the men-servants; no patting of the horses or of Nep, who stood on the upper step watching him gravely, but not fawning on him, or noticing him, as though he knew

something was wrong;—saw him, with bowed head, enter the carriage, and fling himself back among the cushions, and noticed that fastened in his coat was a large bunch of dead roses.

"Oh, Edith!" said poor Gertrude, fairly breaking down, as the carriage passed out of sight, "it is too horrid; and she lying asleep — and they may never meet again."

"I don't see what good looking at him out of the window would have done, or what good your crying and making yourself ill will do either of them. I hope, with all my heart, we shall all remain happy and contented old maids after this most agreeable love episode. I know my mind is made up: I've had my lesson. There, now don't be a little goose and cry any more! 'Men have died, and worms have eaten them; but *not* for love.' No, no,

Gertrude dear; save your tears for a deeper sorrow than a lovers' quarrel. They will either make it up, and live happy (or the reverse) ever after; or they will live to laugh at it when they've each got another idol."

"Did you see he had some dead roses in his coat?" said Gertrude, trying to recover herself, as her sister advised.

"Yes; some gift of May's, I suppose. He flattered himself she would be looking out of the window, or he would not have worn them. I've no doubt he's delighted to think she's breaking her heart for him. Silly little thing! If I'd taken the trouble to quarrel with him, I would not have given him such a plaster for his vanity as getting ill over it."

"Ah, Edith! you will be caught some day, and you'll have the complaint worse than any of us! Poor, sweet May! I dread

her waking. What is to be done about to-morrow?"

"Oh! we must all go, you know, and Auntie will take charge of May if she can't or won't go; but I would in her place, and be the gayest of the gay."

CHAPTER VI.

"THERE'S a young man wants to speak to you, sir," said Stephens to Everard Ashleigh, as he left the library, where he had been having luncheon with his father and Rupert Carrington, who had just arrived.

"To speak to me! What is his name?"

"Ralph Greybrooke, sir, he says his name is; but you would not know that—only he wanted to speak to you very particular."

"Take him into my room, I'll come. I am wanted for a few moments, Carrington," he said, re-opening the door of the library. "If you will look at the paper a little while, I'll come to you as soon as I can."

In his room, when he entered it, stood Ralph, holding in his hand his grey cap, staring with an air of intense interest at the cabinet containing some rare gems of art collected by Everard abroad. He was so absorbed in the contemplation, that he never heard the door open, or knew that Everard was in the room, until he said:

"I beg your pardon—what can I do for you?"

As he turned quickly and bowed respectfully to Everard, he was struck by the unusually handsome, intelligent face.

"I have taken a great liberty, sir, I know," he said, as Everard motioned him to be seated; "but I have heard all through the village of your kindness and your consideration, and how willing you are to give advice when asked."

"I am obliged to the villagers for their good opinion," said Everard, smil-

ing gently. "Let me prove its truth by advising you to the best of my ability. What is it?"

"You see, sir, I am but a poor, unlearned man, in a homely way of life, and I feel that I'm not worth talking to by them as has got more education than me; and there's a sort of feeling in me, too, that I could make for myself a great name if I had but the chance. In the stars and the flowers, and in all the great works of Creation, I hear a voice and a music, that tells me things I have no power to tell again. It seems whispering to me to go and do something—be something better than the mere clod I am. I've been told that our greatest men have sprang from nothing better than myself. Tell me how to make myself more worthy," he said, earnestly, "how to fit myself for companionship—with—with such as have had better

advantages;" and, as he spoke, a flush mounted to his temples.

"I will help you, if I can, most willingly," said Everard, interested at once. "Can you read and write?"

"Yes, sir; I can read pretty fairly, and write and cast accounts."

"Then the rest you can do yourself, my friend. That is really all the education that is needed: will and perseverance will do the rest. You cannot make great men—they must make themselves. What are your tastes?—what interests you most?"

"Well, sir, all in nature. Animals and their ways, birds, insects—all made by the great Hand have an interest for me. I've laid on the ground many a time, forgetting how the moments passed, watching the ants and all their wonderful ways. How they seem to think and tell each other

their thoughts, too, is so strange and wondrous. I couldn't tell you, sir, how my brain is always working and puzzling and yet I can get no good like out of it; and I can't speak in any sense which would make it worth the while of any one with an education to listen to me."

"I feel it very much worth my while to listen to you," said Everard, kindly. "Now, I will lend you some interesting books, which I should like you to read carefully; and, if anything puzzles you in them, bring it to me and I will endeavour to explain it. What evening can you spare in the week to come to school to me?"

"Oh! sir, you are too kind; any evening you name—I will make it do for me, never fear."

"Then, say Thursday, from eight to ten. Will that do?"

"Do! yes. Indeed, you have given me

fresh hope and life, sir. I *will* work, trust me."

"Then you are sure to get on. What is your occupation?"

"I am Mr. Broderip's bailiff, sir."

"You have not much time, then, for study?"

"I can make time. Hours taken from sleep and food, if need be—anything to lift me up above the brutes of the field, who have no understanding, and who yet seem to me so much wiser than I am."

"The fool thinketh himself a wise man; the wise man knoweth himself a fool," said Everard. "I have every hope of you, and shall look forward to our pleasant evenings. I think you will find both interest and amusement in a microscope that I have, and you must bring me fresh specimens for it."

"I shall enjoy that, sir; I have heard tell of them, but never saw through one. But I

must not detain you longer," he said, rising and looking with longing eyes round the room.

"Stay; let me give you the books I wish you to read." And taking down from his shelf Hugh Miller's "My Schools and Schoolmasters," and his "Testimony of the Rocks," Everard handed them to him, saying:

"Keep them as long as you like, and study them carefully. The writer of them had no better chance of a great career than yourself; but patience, perseverance, and observation, made him what he was. An old hammer, with which he chipped pieces of the rocks in the sea-side Scotch home where he lived, was the only tool he used, to work his way to distinction. Go and imitate him."

"I will; and may God reward you for the great, great kindness you are doing me."

"You are heartily welcome, and you

return the kindness by making me feel myself of some use. Good day."

"Who's your friend?" asked Carrington, as Everard joined him; "he passed me in the hall, and I think I have seldom seen a handsomer face."

"Yes, he's a fine fellow, is he not? and a character, too." And Everard related the purport of their conversation.

"Very remarkable. What can have inspired him with such a desire for excellence, as no especial taste seems urging him on?"

"No; but there is that in him of which great men are made—the *wish* to be great, and the indomitable perseverance to become so—sometimes far more useful than the most brilliant genius. He has evidently two other useful, nay almost indispensable, faculties—appreciation and observation. He sees and admires the beautiful in nature and art; and

though, by the accident of birth, he has been placed in a homely rank of life, he has noticed and loved the beauties of nature which his occupation has thrown him amongst, and he feels painfully his inability to express in fitting terms what he so admires."

"And you are going to help him ?—how kind of you, Everard. I feel very small after I have been staying with you; your learning has been, and is, a blessing to yourself and others—a great deal more than mine is. I have cost the poor old Major no end; and I wear a red coat, and that's all the good I have done with it."

"Yes; but you could not have arrived at such honourable distinction as you have, had you not done more good than your modesty will let you own. You passed your very severe examination with flying colours—nearly the top of the list."

"Ah! well, yes, by cramming. What

the better am I now? I've forgotten it all."

"That may be, though I doubt it; learning anything must leave some good behind it. You may forget the taste of food and drink, but it strengthens and nourishes you all the same; and you have attained, at least, by it the chance of leading a forlorn hope some day, or heading a storming party in defence of your Queen and country, which a poor 'nithing' like myself could never have arrived at. Had I been an Anglo-Saxon baby, I should have inevitably been condemned to death as a useless burden. Look at your hands and arms, and mine," he said, laughing, extending his delicate white hands as he spoke, and placing them against the strong, powerful-looking fingers of his friend.

"May mine always be as pure and worthy to be grasped, Everard, is the best wish I

can give myself," said Carrington ; " but now, what are you going to do ? I am going to see Dr. Stillwell, for half-an-hour's chat. I made his acquaintance last time I was here."

" Very well. I have a few business letters to write ; and, as I have been out all the morning, I shall keep to my den this afternoon, unless you want me—if so, command me, and do not scruple to come and sit there if you like."

" Thanks ; but I daresay I shall wander about until dinner. Walter comes down to-night, does he not ? "

" Yes, for the water-party. Poor Dolly thinks we shall all get our deaths of cold ! "

" It is late in the year, certainly ; but it is very warm to-day, though there was a slight frost early—so a fellow told me in the train. Am I to go ? "

" Yes, this elegant little note assures me

so ;" and he took from his pocket a note and handed it to Rupert.

"What pretty writing! Who's your correspondent?—Oh! Lilian. I got a peep at her at last, you know, at Church last Sunday. She is the prettiest of the four, I think. I fancy I've seen her before—at a *fête* at Lady Mostyn's; I feel sure almost I heard some one address her as Lady Lilian, but I was not introduced, and I did not stay long. I hate those day-light things; one doesn't feel up to the mark, and it breaks one's day —interferes with dinner and lunch. Well, I shall go now; ta-ta for the present. I say, Everard, I suppose I must go to-morrow?"

"There's no *must* in the case; but I thought you'd like it, and I think Walter would rather you went."

"All right, then; I'll screw myself up."

The morning, which Gertrude flew out of bed to inspect at a very early hour, broke

with a slight frost and a thick mist, clothing all the distant landscape, and even the large trees in the avenue, making them look like dim, mysterious shadows; and she roused Edith by an exclamation of despair, that it was a foggy day, and they could not go.

"Oh! don't be silly, child," said Edith, sleepily; "it's the surest sign of a fine day, this early mist; do get back into bed, and not disturb one in the middle of the night."

And Edith was quite right. By eleven o'clock the sun had cleared away every trace of mist, and it was bright and warm as a day in June.

"What a day!—made for us, is it not?" said Lilian, as the girls ran to their rooms to get ready.

"Yes; and you look bright as the sun itself, you little beauty!" said Gertrude, kissing her enthusiastically. "Are you fond of a water-party? I never saw you so

pleased at anything in the way of amusement."

"Yes, I love the water," said Lilian; "I should like to travel always that way; the motion of the boat is so charming—but we must make haste, dear, now, and get ready. I can hear a carriage coming up the avenue."

"The Morleys, I dare say. I must fly!"

Edith had tried in vain to persuade May to go; and was vexed that Mistress Medlicott took her view of the matter, and agreed that she could not be expected to go.

"Poor child!" she said, "the very cause of all her sorrow is this party; she would indeed have courage, to go to it, and smile, and be gay, when her poor little heart is so sad."

"And he will hear, of course, that she did not go, and triumph over the heart that is breaking for love of him," said Edith.

"My dear Edith, if *she could* feel that the matter gave her so little concern as to enable her to forget it, and join willingly in your merry-making, I should advise her going; but I would not have her act a part. She has been wrong—she is punished, and is sorry. If he was ever worthy of her, he will not triumph in her sorrow; if he was not, his opinion or sentiments can matter little. She has a reasonable excuse to give for not going—she is not well enough; there is no occasion for any other to be made."

"Well, Auntie, dear, I daresay you know best; but to spend one hour in sadness for a man, who, for a few words of foolish anger—anger, too, caused by love for him—can cast her off, like a glove he is tired of wearing, seems to me very poor spirit indeed."

"'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' Edith; pride is only folly, when wrongly indulged. To be humble and penitent, when you know

yourself wrong, is the duty of every Christian. Poor May shewed unreasonable and intemperate anger, and Philip naturally felt that if, in these early days of their love, she could thus quarrel, how could they live together peaceably when she had to encounter the cares which must come with even the happiest married life. Providence is too often accused of the troubles we make for ourselves. May has certainly made this for herself, and it is well that her sorrow should be equal to her mistake. Now, run away, and get ready. I will take care of her; and I am sure she will pass a happier day alone with me, than in forcing herself to be gay with you."

Disappointed as the girls were to leave May at home, still it was impossible to resist the enjoyment of the bright day on the sparkling water. The merry party, all apparently determined to let nothing mar

the harmony, and continually was Gertrude's attention called to Lilian, whose eyes were kindled with a bright radiance she had never noticed before, and her lips parted with a tender, happy smile, that made her look more beautiful than she had ever looked before. She could not forbear whispering to Edith her astonishment and admiration.

"Well, I suppose, Gertrude," said Edith, "Lilian, after all, is not—as we fancied—less human than any of us; and the attention of handsome Captain Carrington is particularly agreeable."

"Well, it's very nice to see her so happy; she has seemed so sad lately. Where are we to land, to have luncheon, Edith?"

"At the meadow joining Oatland's, I believe. There are such superb trees there."

"What can have become of Mr. Prescott, Edith? Don't you feel very disconsolate?"

"Not in the least."

"Well, I think we ought to have waited for him, poor fellow. We did not make allowance for the difference of clocks."

"Auntie was anxious to get us off. He can follow us: Auntie knows where we are going to; and he can cross in the ferry boat."

"Yes; but he's lost this delicious pull up here. Oh, Mr. Ashleigh! what are you doing? You'll go over!"

"No, naught is never in danger, Lady Gertrude," answered Walter. "Ma'mselle wants those 'forget-me-nots.'"

"Ah! so kind, so good to me. For my foolish fancy I should be desolated for you to drown."

"I will take care of myself," he said, making a snatch at a bunch, and bearing them safely into the barge.

"Oh! give me some, Ma'mselle; I love

forget-me-nots," said Gertrude; but before Ma'mselle could separate them to give her a few, Everard handed her a small bunch he had gathered, without observation, higher up the stream.

"Thank you, Mr. Ashleigh, so much! Why, you are like a conjuror. Did you get them out of your hat?"

"No," he said, smiling; "I pulled them some way further back."

"Yes; and he has had time to put them up properly, while mine are all mixed with duckweed," said Walter. "That is a shame! Let me try to do them like his, Ma'mselle."

"Oh, no! Why should you give yourself such pains? I shall manage that."

"Do you like the water, Lady Lilian?" asked Carrington, as Lilian lay back among the cushions, with that look of happiness in her face which Gertrude had noticed,

seemingly too happy to break the spell by a word.

"Oh! so much," she said, with a sort of sigh of infinite content. "It is so peaceful—so beautiful."

"I like to be rowed better than towed, though," he said, laughing.

"Yes; I, too, miss the pleasant plash of the oars," she said, smiling; "but we were too large a party for one boat, and we decided that it would spoil the fun to divide our party."

"That it certainly would. You have one sister not here?"

"Yes, May is not well: and one of our gentlemen has deserted us, too—Mr. Prescott."

"I don't know him."

"He is a most agreeable person—just fit for a party of this kind."

"Are we going to land here?"

"I think so. Do you know the beautiful ruined abbey at Oatlands?"

"No; I have seen none of the lions of the neighbourhood: but I think I shall come and take up my abode in this neighbourhood, some day."

"Carrington, help Lady Lilian out; we are going to land here," said Walter.

"Now, Doctor, you are to take the greatest possible care of me," said Gertrude; "and mind the cloth is not laid in a meadow where there are any cows."

"Don't you like cows?"

"No, I'm frightened to death at them. That's right, thank you; my shawl, please. Oh, come along! I see such a lovely place. You can carry that basket, and my book, and my parasol—and this camp stool. No, not my flowers; I can manage those—come along!" and away she went, the poor old Doctor toiling after her—dropping half

the things she had bid him carry, and having to stop and pick them up, and running after the little lithe figure which sped along before him—so glad when she threw herself down beneath the spreading branches of a fine old oak, and he could deposit the things and get his breath. But she did not give him much time for that; for, seeing the rest of the party going—as she thought—in an opposite direction, she sent him off to conduct them to the spot she had selected, and where, perched on the gnarled root of the old tree, her back against its stem, she watched the poor old Doctor going back through the hot sun—perfect slave to her will, as she always made him.

The party had assembled under the tree, and having set out their luncheon, were just commencing to eat it, when Gertrude exclaimed:

"See—see! here comes the truant;"

and looking round, they saw, at the further end of the field, Prescott, accompanied by a small boy, in a smock frock, evidently guiding him to his party.

"Thank you, my man; do not fatigue yourself any further," he said, as soon as he caught sight of the group beneath the tree: "I see my friends. Accept this trifling mark of gratitude and esteem," and he placed a shilling in the hand of the child, who stared at it for a moment; and then, with a grin of satisfaction, and a vigorous pull of his hair—expressive of his acknowledgments — he went off at that shuffling pace, which is the only idea a country boy seems to have of running—probably from the fact of the great weight of their shoes, and their being always too big for them.

"Why, Mr. Prescott, where have you been? What made you so late? Did

you not understand what time we said?" were the questions which assailed him.

"Perfectly; but the train had not the slightest respect for my feelings, and would not arrive at the station till a quarter to one. I ordered my trap to be there to meet me, and drove direct to the ferry. With that intelligence peculiar to me, I supposed—as I was invited to a water party—I should, probably, be on the right track if I made for the river. The ferryman gave a lucid description of you as 'three gents with a lot of ladies, and a sight of 'ampers; and he'd heard them say as they wanted to be towed in the pleasure barge, up as far as Oatlands. A small youth, son of the worthy ferryman, proposed to show me a short cut; and here I am."

"The train?" said Gertrude, wonderingly,

when he finished speaking: "you did not come in the train from Oakdean?"

"Oh dear, no! Business took me up to London, yesterday; and I hurried back, not to escape this pleasure. Have you been sketching, Lady Edith?" he said, taking a seat next her.

"No; I have not yet availed myself of Mr. Morland's permission. I did not think about it, or I might have brought my sketching things."

"Yes; that would have been charming. I should like to have watched you sketching."

"You would not, certainly, have had that extraordinary pleasure, then. I never allow any one to look over me when I'm drawing. But don't you think the Miss Morleys look as though they wanted their luncheon? do go and see to them. Gertrude," she said, calling to her sister, who

was standing talking to Everard Ashleigh, "do come and see about having luncheon; we're all starved."

"I'm coming; it's all laid. Why cannot you all begin?" she answered; "I'm having a botanical lesson."

"We will finish it by-and-bye," said Everard, gazing down into the face which was looking with such eager interest into his.

"Will you tell me more about it, presently? I had no idea there was so much to know about flowers. I love them every one—the veriest weed that grows by the way-side, to the gorgeous hot-house blossoms. But I know nothing about them, and cannot remember one of their names. I'm always reduced to calling them 'the pink thing with the spiky leaves,' and those sort of accurate descriptions—to dear Dr. Stillwell's great horror, who tells me it's

something with a frightful Latin name, which is more impossible to remember than the English one."

"I will tell you their country names; which, perhaps, you will find easier to remember. But you must eat something now. Food for the body is more important to-day than food for the mind. What may I give you?"

"Oh! anything that gives you the least trouble to get at; I have the most unromantic appetite, and can eat anything, and I am frightfully hungry now; but it is certainly eating under difficulties," she said, trying to poise her plate on her knees.

"Stay; let me invent something better," and in a moment he had dragged out a log of wood lying under the hedge, folded a plaid on it, and over that spread a clean cloth he had discovered in one of the hampers, which Gertrude said, as she laugh-

ingly took her seat at this improvised table, was brought to wash the glasses.

"I don't know what Stephens will say to you if he has to wash any glasses, for you know it's half the fun of a picnic not to bring half enough things, and have to wash them, and all that sort of thing."

"You will not have prevented the cloth from doing duty as a glass cloth afterwards by merely putting your plate on it," answered Everard.

"Not if I'm a good little girl, and don't spill anything; but are you not going to get something to eat yourself?"

"Yes, I think I will now, if you are sure you have all you want."

"Yes—as far as I know. Go in quest of your own provision now."

"How comfortable Everard has made your sister, Lady Lilian. Could not I manage an

inverted basket, or something of the sort for you ?" said Rupert.

"No, thank you ; I am getting on capitally."

"Lilian, Mr. Prescott proposes we should go and see the ruins after lunch," said Edith.

"What will Mr. Morland say to such an incursion ?"

"I will head the storming party, Lady Lilian," answered Prescott ; "and as, by the time we arrive, he will have got to his second bottle of port, he will be as amiable as a well-fed boa-constrictor."

"Second bottle of port at this hour!" said Carrington.

"Draw it mild," said Walter, softly.

"A fact, 'pon honour," answered Prescott. "He gets up at five in the morning, and walks over his farm, then comes in and makes a tremendous breakfast ; then gets his horse and rides till twelve, when he comes in and

drinks a quart of beer; then puzzles his head over his letters and accounts, and takes another walk till two, at which time he has his dinner; and after that the port wine entertainment goes on, which lasts him, with a nap and the newspaper, until six, when he has a pipe and some whisky toddy, and retires to bed about eight or nine. If you can catch him between the port and the whisky, then is the propitious time to demand a favour."

"We had better make sure of that moment for invading his grounds, then," said Lilian, laughing.

"Yes; I think in half-an-hour from this moment we will proceed."

And thus they chatted, and laughed, and sang snatches of song, trying to harmonise airs, and breaking down with merry laughter at their failures; so idly happy—some of the party—that that day was for

ever remembered, with a lingering regret that it was numbered with the past, and could never more return with its strange sense of happiness and rest.

The old Abbey was a beautiful ruin, and those who had not before seen it were loud in their admiration of it. Everard had offered his arm to Gertrude, and they had resumed their conversation about flowers.

"There!" she exclaimed; "now that's what I call a crocus!" and darting forward, she gathered a flower growing among the grass, its petals as like to a pale lilac crocus as possible, and not to be distinguished by a casual observer.

"That is the meadow saffron," said Everard. "You see this has six stamens; the crocus has only three; and we have not here its long, grass-like leaves. It is the colchicum so much used by doctors in rheumatic complaints. The flower only blooms in

autumn. It was originally a native of Colchis, hence its botanic name."

"Why, Mr. Ashleigh, you know everything!"

"Oh dear, no!" he said, laughing; "how I wish I did; but if I did, I should only arrive at the fact that I knew nothing. I think that is the end of all human learning —the finding out how little we can know."

"I think to be very learned would frighten me," said Gertrude. "To know all about the stars, and how they are inhabited, and that this earth, which seems so vast, is only a little twinkling thing like them after all, liable to be swept away by the tail of a comet; and that the sun has great mountains all over his poor face, and that the moon is in 'apogee,' whatever that is. Oh dear! I'd rather be contented to see them up there, a nice long way off, shining so pleasantly, and call them sun,

moon, and stars, and not balls of fire and other worlds, and all that sort of thing."

This led him to tell the story of Ralph Greybrooke's anxiety for learning, which interested Gertrude intensely; and so they wandered along, Everard growing to think the "bright child," as he called her beside him, was the brightest thing that had ever crossed his path; and into the pale face with the somewhat sad expression there came a light, reflected from the joyous, glad heart beside him, till Walter was fain to whisper, as the barge glided down the stream going home, and he sat still beside the child: "Take care, old man! remember!" and so the day ended; and in the dreams of many of that happy party, faces were mingled and words were repeated—words which the speakers had forgotten, but which in memory were to make music for ever in the ears of those who listened.

CHAPTER IV.

'WHEN do you intend returning to the 'little village,' Carrington?" said Walter, as he stood in the hall, preparatory to taking his departure to town. "Shall I find you here on Saturday?"

"No; I shall come up to-morrow or Thursday. I've given you a sufficiently long benefit, I think."

"Well, as far as that goes, I've seen little or nothing of you."

"Well, I'll come down with you—perhaps, Saturday: that is, if the Major is in the same state."

"Very well; good-bye; look us up when you come to town."

"Yes, of course."

"Keep an eye, too, on the ghost," he said, in a lower tone.

"Yes, I will; but there have been no lights since I have been here."

"No; it's very strange. I shall go and see Grace one day this week, if I can, for she, too, is a puzzle to me. I mus tgo; I shall lose my train."

It was another day, bright and warm as the last, as though summer lingered loth to bid farewell.

The woods were beautiful in their many tinted leaves; but they fell slowly, one by one, at every light breeze that stirred them, or with the fluttering of the birds' wings, as they hopped from bough to bough; children's voices mingled with the twittering of birds, picking the blackberries which were ripening with the warm sun, as they gathered the dry wood for "mother's fire."

Just at the entrance was a woodman's cottage, and the grey smoke from the wood fire curled up among the trees, filling the air with its pleasant scent. At the door, with the sunshine resting on her head like a blessing, stood Kathleen, with a golden-haired baby in her arms, who had got fast hold in its chubby hands of a velvet which she wore round her neck.

"My pet, I must go," she said, kissing it. "Here, Patty, take the boy, and undo his fingers gently—he has hold of my velvet."

As the child she called, disentangled it from the baby's tenacious hold, she pulled a locket out from Kathleen's dress, to which the velvet was attached.

"Oh, my! ain't that pretty! Let go, do, Johnny!" said the little nurse, taking baby rather forcibly away, who kicked and struggled manfully.

Kathleen laughed, and said:

"How flattering baby's love is: he does not like to leave me."

"No wonder!" said a voice behind her. She turned, and a painful flush mounted to her temples.

"Oh! Mr. Carrington," she said, in a sad, reproachful tone.

"I can *not* help it. Let us walk this way," he whispered; "I want to talk to you."

"Yes; but you promised——"

"I promised to *try*. I have tried, but it is useless; your face is in my dreams, your voice for ever in my ears: it is not in my power to forget you, Kathleen. I loved you from the moment I first saw you; it is my fate—I cannot fight against it, nor do I wish."

"Mr. Carrington, this is worse than folly; you! a gentleman of birth and position!—What would your friends say?"

"I have no friends who would have a right to interfere. Stay and listen to me, Kathleen, for I cannot bear this torture any longer. You can spare me a few moments—you *must!*"

"You are unkind, Mr. Carrington; you do not remember that you also torture me."

"My darling!" he whispered, bending low to look into the beautiful eyes, in which tears were glistening; "then you *do* love me? What possible obstacle can there be then to your being my own dear wife? Sit, dearest—and here—let me tell you *how* I love you; and that if you love me as I see, I feel you do, nothing but death shall part us. Have you no reason but the foolish one you have so often urged?—the difference of our position. My sweet love," he continued, emboldened by her silence and agitation, drawing her nearer to him, "not so different as you think.

If I dared tell you all, which I shall hope to do some day, you might feel how equal we are, only that you are richer far in grace and beauty, and all that is most dear in woman; so that, were I king or emperor, with all the wealth of the world at my command, it would be cheaply sacrificed to purchase your love." He held her hands—her little trembling hands—in his now. She did not withdraw them, but still she did not answer. "Kathleen, dear heart, answer me one little word—there is no other, gentle or simple, that you would rather hear say to you, I love you?" She shook her head, and drew her hands away, to press the tears from her eyes; and then she said, in a low, interrupted voice:

"Do you love me well enough to see me no more, speak to me no more, unless I bid you come; to believe me when I say, for *your* sake I will not be your wife; but——"

"But that you *do* love me," he said, snatching her hands again, and holding them closely to his heart. "You must say that too, and on that joy I will try to live till the mysterious obstacle, whate'er it is, no longer parts us. Kathleen, do say so?"

"What need to say what you, too soon, have learnt?" she answered, sadly; "but, oh! how bitterly I rue that we have ever met."

"If we never meet again I shall not regret it, Kathleen. It will be for ever a bright—a blessed memory to me; and I shall carry to my grave the first and only love I ever felt, cherishing it in my heart of hearts, alone and unrivalled for ever. But tell me, is there a faint hope that this obstacle to our happiness can ever be removed?"

"Yes, a very faint one," she said, slowly.

"What can it mean?—Kathleen, you are not married?"

"Oh, no!" she said, and a smile shone through her tears; "but you know," she continued, trying to speak more cheerfully, "you are a gentleman, and I——"

"A lady."

She started, and looked eagerly into his face.

"Yes, Kathleen; a lady's form and face, a lady's manners, and a lady's heart. By what strange accident or freak of fortune you are placed in your humble position, I know not; but, be you what you may, a Duke might wed you and feel no shame."

"And so he might," she said, suddenly; "I do believe in your love and in your truth, and thus far I must trust you. I am not what I seem. I am your equal in birth and position; but I can be no man's wife. This secret I trust only to you—keep it as you love me; and now let me go—oh! *let* me go."

"I felt sure, from the first, you had a story, my darling," he said, still holding her. "Why, where is the brogue gone, my peasant bride?" He spoke playfully now that the one difficulty, the only difficulty he believed in, was removed.

She smiled up in his face, but it was a tearful smile; and again she said, beseechingly, "Let me go."

"No, no; tell me first all this dreadful secret: its fears and difficulties will vanish with the telling. Here—with your dear head on the heart which only lives for you; with the arms about you, which shall be for ever your defence—all that seems difficult and impossible will vanish. What is it, love?"

"No; I cannot tell you. I have already said more—much more—than I meant; but I could not resist letting you know that you had not demeaned yourself by loving me, Rupert," she said, half shyly uttering his

name; "and now go, I entreat; and in your thoughts, call me Madeleine."

"Madeleine!" he repeated; "then your name is not Kathleen O'Brian?"

"No. Ask no more, but go!"

"Go! And where—when may I see you again?"

"Oh! Rupert, Rupert! never again on earth; it is better so, indeed;" and the tears she had tried to stop poured down her cheeks. "Go, and God bless you and help you to forget me!"

He stopped a second, and then lifting his hat, he said solemnly:

"May He help me to remember you—to be true to myself and you, henceforth and for ever: and, as you wish it, love, now farewell. Make me at parting this one promise, that this difficulty removed you will be my wife."

"I will." As she spoke the simple words

slowly, tenderly, and reverently, her eyes, wet with tears, looking straight into his, he drew her to him, and pressing one long kiss on her lips, he murmured :

" God bless and have thee in His keeping, my Madeleine—my own for ever ! " and then broke away from her, nor dared he look back, or he would have seen her sink upon the ground and sob as though her heart would break—sob so that she heard no footsteps behind her, no sound, till a voice said :

" Miss O'Brian, what is it ? Can I help you ? "

She started to her feet, and saw before her Ralph Greybrooke.

" No ; no, thank you, Ralph. I have over tired myself, that is all ; I am going in. What are you doing ?—studying ? " she said, trying to command her voice.

" Yes, I am learning as I walk. I never

lose a moment—never, Miss O'Brian. Mr. Ashleigh says I shall get on—I shall be great some day."

"I hope so—but to be good is better, Ralph; and you are that, you know."

"*You* think so?" he said eagerly, and his face, which had been so pale lately, flushed with pleasure.

"I do, indeed, good Ralph. But I must get home now. Go on with your studies—but you will not forget your duties, will you?"

"No, I hope not; although there are times when I forget all and everything but one. Good-day;" and abruptly turning away, he struck into another path, and Kathleen went slowly back to the farm, in dread lest the traces of tears should be seen by Mrs. Broderip.

And Rupert walked on through the wood and over the meadows, in a maze and be-

wilderment of feeling, which made him so unmindful of his road that he was astonished to find himself so soon at the Priory. Everard was just going out as he came in.

"Oh! here you are," he said; "are you inclined to call at the Manor House? I am going to see how the ladies are, and take a book for—for one of them."

"No, thank you; I have letters to write."

"Very well. Take care, you'll lose that!" Rupert looked down to where Everard pointed, and found, hanging to the links which fastened his coat, a locket. He was about to deny the ownership, but suddenly a thought occurred to him, and he merely thanked him, and disentangling it, placed it in his pocket. Safe locked in his own room, he took it out, and opening it, saw the face of a young and beautiful woman, with so unmistakeable a likeness to his darling, that he was sure it must be mother or sister; and

sat holding it in his hand, gazing with eager, loving looks at the sweet eyes that were so like hers—longing that the ruddy lips would part, and he could hear that dear voice once more repeating, "I will." It must be her locket, and he must return it. She could not be vexed with him for that, besides he had not wished the old folks good-bye, who had been so kind to him—he must go once more; but he would write and tell her so, and she would forgive him, and be glad, as he was, that some reasonable excuse had made them meet again. And then a sudden thought of pain possessed him—she said she was equal in birth and position to himself. What if her friends choose to inquire into his, might there not be another obstacle arise to their union? Surely he might tell her the secret that weighed upon his life; even the Major would consent to release him so far from his promise. The

event of his marriage had never been considered in his pledge to secrecy; surely between him and his future wife there should be entire confidence. He thought long and deeply on this subject, and then made up his mind that when the one obstacle in their path of happiness was removed—for he could not doubt but that it would be—he would tell Madeleine his story, and leave it to her decision. Then—writing a long letter, enclosing her locket, in case she should not be at home when he went down to the farm—he made up his mind to walk there the first thing in the morning, and leave for London in the evening, resolving not to return to Haseley Mere till he could claim his bride; for the hope was strong in him that, loving him as he saw she did, she would exert herself in any way to remove the impediment, or persuade herself not to consider it one. It was evidently, he

thought, some family disaster, or why should she change her name, and allow herself to be considered the grand-child of the old farmer. Some sudden and unexpected loss of fortune, through some wrong doing of brother or father, probably. Did the old folks know her secret, and her father's name? And then another idea rushed into his mind. Perhaps she did not know herself; and he pictured the beautiful face in the locket, weeping bitter tears of penitence as she told her tale to her young innocent child; and how, perhaps, in horror, she had fled, renouncing home and friends, and determining to make an honest name for herself. Still, even with this fresh thought, he never swerved from his allegiance to his idol—she herself was purity and innocence itself; perfect in form and mind to him, he cared not who she was—she was "*his* queen," and nothing she could tell him would alter his love or

his faith. Deep in such thoughts, the dinner bell sounded before he had moved from the table, where he had sat with his hands supporting his head, thus conjecturing and puzzling over this new event in his life ; and he had to make a hurried toilet and overpower Mr. Ashleigh with apologies, who stood at the head of the table when he entered, and, with a grim smile, asked him if he had a fancy for cold fish.

The evening passed very slowly, for neither of the young men were inclined to talk ; and Mr. Ashleigh, pleading several business letters, went early to his room.

"Suppose we turn in, Everard?" said Rupert, about an hour after.

"Yes, by all means, if you like. I feel rather unusually tired."

As they went up the broad staircase, and passed the large window at the end of the

gallery, into which the bedrooms opened, Everard exclaimed:

"See! there is a light there now—in the old wing—look! It is he, you may depend; but how does he get in, and what does he go for?"

As he spoke, his father's door opened, and he came out of the room.

"Well, young men, are you off to bed?"

Everard was so startled at sight of him that for a moment he could not answer; but Rupert said:

"We were looking at the mysterious light, which has again appeared in the wing, sir."

"Oh! has it? Let me see. Yes, truly, there is a glimmer. Well, why not to-night inspect the mystery? Get some one to run down for the constable, and you two fellows begin to take the boards down. You will find some tools in the cupboard under the

stairs, where the logs for the hall fire are kept—you know, Everard."

"I think it is scarcely worth while," said Rupert, answering Everard's look. "The ghost is so harmless, sir—he seems only to amuse himself by lighting up the wing with his very small candle—that he may as well go on without interruption. There is no possible communication with this part of the house, I suppose, by which he could trouble us here?"

"Oh dear, no! my dear fellow. And I so perfectly agree with you, that I should never trouble my head about it—only that it alarms the household. I have no doubt it is some curious optical delusion. Half the ghost stories are founded on something of the sort. Well, if you won't go, I will wish you good night."

"Good night, sir. Come in my room,"

Rupert," whispered Everard. "Now, what do you think?"

"Think! What I have always thought, that your father, for some purpose of his own, in the same way that you encouraged the idea, wishes the wing to be thought haunted; and either he himself, or someone appointed by him, places the light there."

"But how does he get in?"

"Ah! that is to be discovered; and I should advise you to take no more notice of the lights, but try to find out what possible access is still left to that wing."

"I will. I will take Dolly into my counsel. She may be able to find out from some old inhabitant of the village whether there is any way to it beside through the house. We will set about it to-morrow, and may have some news for you by Saturday."

"I don't think I shall come down on Saturday."

"Indeed! Are you tired of us?"

"Not in the least; but I have some other friends I ought to see; and, for many reasons, I do not think I shall be down here again just yet."

In the dead of that night, when all were peacefully sleeping—Rupert, with Madeleine's locket under his pillow, dreaming of their interview—a man, with eager white face, was kneeling beside a chest in the old wing of the priory—a dark lantern on the table beside him. He was taking from the chest heaps of old yellow letters bearing foreign addresses, and destroying them—tearing them up, and burning them in the old fireplace; then, with a sigh of weariness, he closed and locked the chest, and taking his lantern, walked towards the

side of the room opposite the door, and pressing his thumb on the wall, a panel opened, through which he passed, silently closing it after him.

CHAPTER V.

"Ah! old fellow, how d'ye do?" said Walter, as Rupert opened the door of his room. "So you've got back?"

"Yes; how are you?"

"All right—thanks. Any news from Haseley Mere?"

"Lights again," said Rupert, laughing.

"Oh, indeed! Any light thrown on them?"

"Not much. It's your father, I am sure. I left Everard determined to discover if there was not some mode of getting into the room, except through the door-way which is boarded-up."

"Well, yes, I should think that will

be the first thing to get at; but what does he do there?"

"There's no saying. He wishes to keep up the idea of a ghostly visitant to avert suspicion from himself."

"He's a mystery altogether to me. Oh! by-the-bye, I went down after business yesterday to see Grace, and I have found out *her* mystery—her being so happy, I mean—which so puzzled me. My mother is there with her. She has not been so happy for years."

"Your mother?"

"Yes; they concocted a little plot together. Mrs. Ambrose takes anyone into the Home, without question, who pleads sorrow; and Grace wrote to her mother, and suggested that she should come under a feigned name, and take up her abode there. My father has made out that poor mother is totally unfit to have the care of the child,

and that he places Grace there to be protected from her; so, of course, it would not do to say who she is."

"Then they cannot be much comfort to each other?"

"Oh, yes! They enacted the little farce of being strangers at first, and then they were supposed to take a fancy to one another; and now they are constantly together, and under the same roof night and day, sharing in the same useful employments, till you would not know Grace, she is so improved. The elixir of happiness has done wonders for her."

"Poor girl! I am glad to hear it; but what if your father takes a fancy to make a call, or insists on Grace returning to the Priory?"

"The ladies of the Home only 'show' to the visitors who ask for them. It would be by some very rare chance if they met;

and I do not fancy he will urge Grace's return, if she expresses herself happy and content. He is happier himself, I believe, without her; for the very fact that he loves her as much as he can love anything, and more than any one else, rather bores him, for he has to consider her. It grieves him when she looks sad; and for her he will often control his temper. When she is away, he is free to do as he likes; so that, to be satisfied of her happiness, and to flatter himself with the idea that she never sees her mother, will reconcile him to letting her stay."

"Ah! I see. Well, he's the oddest character I ever met with."

"You may say so. Now, what will you have for the good of the house?"

"Nothing, my dear fellow, thank you. I have this moment dined."

"A weed, then?"

"Well, yes; I don't mind that. Your landlady does not object to 'two or three young friends of yours' smoking here?"

"Not in the least; and though they

'Do spoil the new carpet,
This brave young man don't care,'"

sung Walter, as he placed the cigars on the table before his friend. "What a song that is—something like a comic song!"

"Yes—very much."

"Yes—very much! I suppose it would be rude to say there does not appear much sense in that last remark?"

"No, not at all. I was attracted at the moment by this song, and did not attend to what you were saying." And he took up, from a heap of songs lying on a chair near him, "Kathleen Mavourneen."

Walter's face flushed slightly as he answered:

"Oh, yes! I have been trying over some

old things, which were my landlady's daughter's. She is very anxious that I shan't be dull of an evening, and sends me up books and music continually. By-the-way, have you seen the real Kathleen lately?"

"Yes; to tell you the truth, it was on that subject I've looked in here to-night."

"Oh!"

"Yes; you and I have been chums so long, Pop, that I can't bear to have a secret from you, at least any one that I am at liberty to disclose; and so I wanted to come and tell you what an awfully miserable happy dog I am. I dare say you will be deucedly astonished, and blow me up no end," he went on, nervously, as Walter made no answer, but smoked on in silence. "The fact is, I and the sweet little beauty are engaged; at least—that is to say, I told her how I loved her, and she does me the honour of returning it."

"How about unequal marriages?" said Walter, rising and knocking the ashes from his cigar against the mantle-piece.

"Well, as to that, I think that will be all right; but there's some confounded obstacle or another that she says is not to be got over; and she begged me to forget her, and all that sort of bosh, as though it was possible, or she wished I should. No, no; I shall live in hope of claiming her some day as my bride—the sweetest, loveliest woman in England. Don't you congratulate me, Pop?"

"Well, just at present I don't see much cause, Rupe."

"You don't, you icicle, you!—not to have won the love of such a girl as that?"

"The daughter of an Irish soldier, and the granddaughter of a small tenant farmer!"

"What has that to do with her? Does it make her one jot the less beautiful, the less virtuous, the less worthy of love and devotion?"

"The less fitted to be the wife of a gentleman—yes!" said Walter, calmly.

"Stuff and nonsense! she——"

"Among the many evils and sorrows of this evil world, the one which has in it more of bitterness than any other comes of an ill-assorted marriage," said Walter.

"Hang it, Pop, you're always quoting those words of mine—words born, then, of bitter thoughts and memories. But, Pop, 'There is a Providence which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we may.' The very thing which, of all others, we think we would not do, we do; and what we think wisest and most admirable, we do not. We are as puppets, after all, playing our parts on this brief stage—some in

tragedies and some in comedies—and it is well to believe that the parts chosen for us are wisest and fittest for us, and play them with a good will, and a hearty intention to make the best of them."

"Just so."

"Of course it is very miserable to be parted, just as we know each other's feelings; but the love which will not bear the test of absence, is only a sham sort of love. She tells me there is a faint hope that this mysterious bar to our union may some day be removed; and, in the meanwhile, I shall 'wait and hope.'"

"Exactly."

"Well, you're a most unsympathising dog to tell a love story to. I wish I had not told you, now."

"No, you don't—at least, you won't," he said; and, with a little impetuous action, at variance with his quiet words and

manner, Walter tossed the end of his cigar into the fireplace, and, walking to the window, drew the blind up, and leaning his face against the pane, looked out into the night.

"Pop, this is like a horrible prophecy: 'It may be for years, and it may be for ever.' God forbid! I should like to burn the song," said Rupert, throwing it across the room; and coming up to where his friend stood, he laid his hand on Walter's shoulder, and said: "Do you know, it seems to alter one, somehow, to know that the happiness of another is so entirely woven in one's own—to believe that every hour in the day there is some one thinking of one—some one praying for one, Walter, may be: it must make one a better man—or it ought. I used to think a good deal of myself, before this; and now, I feel what am I that I should

deserve such happiness. But I shall try to deserve her—bless her! It was so dreadful to see her cry, Walter—to see that bright, laughing face covered with tears, and tears for me, too; I felt so miserable and yet so happy. She dropped a locket, and I took it back this morning—though we had settled not to meet again: but I could not resist the chance of one more look. But she was out. I believe she feared I should come, and went on purpose. I left it, with a letter, with my old friend Mrs. Broderip, who looked very sly and as though she knew all about it, so I hope I shall get a letter from her—perhaps she's writing it now. But here, I'm boring you with all this, which must seem such foolery to you. I beg your pardon, old fellow: we'll talk about something else."

"I've such a desperate headache, Rupert—to tell you the truth—that, inhospitable

as it seems, I think I must turn you out," said Walter, lifting his head from the window, where he had remained silent and immovable during Rupert's speech.

"Oh! by all means; and you turn in at once: it's the only chance for a headache. I'll go directly. I'll look you up in the morning."

He seized his friend's hand in his hearty grip, and it was cold as death itself.

"Why, you *are* seedy, old fellow! Have some hot brandy and water. Shall I ring for the water, and make it for you?" he asked kindly, looking anxiously in Walter's white face.

"No—no, thank you."

"Yes, but you must have some: promise you will, or I won't go."

"Yes—yes, I will: good night."

"Good night. Mrs. Penley," said Rupert, as he went past the parlour in which the

good lady always sat, "just give an eye to Mr. Ashleigh. I don't think he's over well."

"Oh, thank you, sir! — certainly, sir. I'll go and see after him a'most directly, and take him up something a little 'ot and comfortable. Good night, sir."

CHAPTER VI.

"Well, I don't know, Briggs, what she will say; she'll be very angry, you may be sure. I know I should. I should feel inclined to kill you!"

"Well, my Lady, I know I deserve she should. I'm as sorry as I can be; and I'm sure I sincerely hope it won't cause any disagreeableness between my Lady and his Grace—I should never forgive myself for that, I'm sure."

"Oh! as to that, I don't suppose it will make any difference," answered Gertrude, growing rather red under the searching gaze of the maid; "but how came you to forget it?"

"Why, you see, my Lady, I put it in my pocket when his Grace's man gave it me, and Lady May was still asleep, and I'd orders on no account to wake her, so, of course, I did not go up again then, meaning to give it to her ladyship directly I did go up. Then, you know, she was took with one of her 'steric fits, and we was all in the direst confusion imaginable, so I thought no more about the letter till I went up to dress myself. Then I put my hand in my pocket—there it was. 'Gracious me!' thinks I, 'there's my lady's letter;' and I thought how should I have liked to have been served so—and I was that vexed with myself, you can't tell — so I laid it where I thought I should be sure to see it, and actually came down without it. I never went near my room any more till night; when, of course, I bethought me

of the letter; but it was nowhere to be found. I hunted and hunted, and I was afraid, I own, to mention it, hoping to find it; and this very morning, when Betsy cleaned my room, under the drawers lay the letter."

"Well, Briggs, you must take it her directly, and tell her the plain truth. There's nothing like it."

"I suppose I must; but I'm in an awful fright."

Lying on a couch in the girl's room was the Lady May: at her feet sat Lilian, working; and, beside her, Edith was reading aloud to her. In every way the girls still tried to cheer and comfort May; but the sadness and bitterness were still piteous to behold. She took no pleasure in anything, but would lie, hour after hour, turning the ring—his ring—round and round on her fingers, which she had

strictly refused to return, unless he demanded it. She had said:

"I will never give it back, till either he or I am engaged to some one else. For the latter reason, I shall never be compelled."

There was a knock at the door; and, with a face white as death, Briggs entered.

"What is it, Briggs? Anything the matter with Auntie?" exclaimed Lilian, rising from her seat.

"Oh, no! my Lady: nothing the matter with any one—only, I'm afraid Lady May will be so very angry with me."

"I, Briggs!—angry! No, never more, never angry any more," and two large tears —tears now always too ready to come— welled up in her eyes.

"Oh! but I should deserve it. I ought to have given you this a week ago, my Lady;" and, with a trembling hand, Briggs presented the letter to her young mistress.

"What is it? Who is it from?" asked Edith, as May took it, with a face scarcely less white than her maid's.

"From Philip," answered May very quietly.

"Well, don't faint, child; wine, Lilian," she said hastily; but May motioned the glass away, which Lilian quietly brought to her, and opened the letter.

"I hope, my Lady, you forgive me?" began Briggs, putting her apron to her eyes.

"Go away, do," said Edith, sharply; "and remember, for the future, to bring letters and messages up directly."

"But, you see, my Lady——"

"Go! I said," answered Edith, rising and pointing to the door; and Briggs, much discomfited, but relieved that May had not stormed at her, as she expected, left the room.

May read her letter all through—the two tears which had filled her eyes falling on it as she read—and then, placing it in Lilian's hands, she said:

"It must be all over now for ever;" and lying back on her couch, she closed her eyes and spoke no more. It ran thus:

"My Darling,

"Forgive me! Forget this storm which has clouded our bright day, and let us be happy again. I was proud—foolish—idiotic. Get well again, my precious; and write me one line to say, 'Come back, Philip.' Oh! will I not come? Send it to the Lord Warden, dear, at Dover—for three days I shall be there; but if illness—which God forbid—prevent your writing, I will stay till Monday, there, in the hope of hearing. If no word or message—for which I thirst—

comes then, I shall leave England ; probably, for ever. But you will write to your own

"PHILIP."

"There is nothing for it, Mistress Medlicott, but change of air and scene," said the physician, whom, at last, Auntie had sent for, and to whom she had felt it right to tell all the story of her dear child's sorrow. "Who can minister to a mind diseased? If I was to give the poor girl all the medicine out of my surgery I should only poison her, rob you, and do her no earthly good. No, no, Madam; take her away, and, if possible, recall the recreant knight. He will be her best physician; and, you see, under the circumstances, we must put pride in our pockets. Take her to the sea—some nice bracing place, where there's plenty of life—and get some friend to write to his Grace, and say, the sooner

he comes home and begs pardon, the better. God bless my soul! it's ridiculous quarrelling like this: they must make it up, Madam," and the good-hearted little man paced up and down the room, taking handsfull of snuff to console himself. "Now, get her off at once: good morning."

She made no objection. Anywhere they liked: what did it signify? All places were alike to her, now. Lilian suggested Dover. A slight flush tinged her pale face, and she said, "Yes." Mistress Medlicott would not go—she preferred the quiet of home, only imploring that she might have daily letters from them; and so May and her sisters, with Ma'mselle and the penitent Briggs, started, at the end of the week, for the gay Kentish watering-place.

CHAPTER VII.

The day after the ladies started for Dover, Mistress Medlicott ordered the carriage, and drove to Oatlands, on an errand to Sydney Prescott. The words of the Doctor, "Get some mutual friend to write to the Duke," had lingered in her thoughts, and she had now made up her mind to do so. Her favourite, she knew, was the most intimate friend the Duke had, and she had every confidence that he would execute his mission with tact and delicacy; for, notwithstanding his light, gay manner, she, who was a great observer and keen judge of character, felt sure there was a vein of deep feeling

beneath, and no small amount of common sense, which kept that feeling from running into puerile sentimentality, or frittering away with outward demonstration. She believed he was one who would act kindly, promptly, and unselfishly, when he could serve a friend; *saying* very little, but doing very much.

He was unfortunately not at home; but, after a long talk on the subject with his mother, she said she would send Sydney over the following day to hear all Mistress Medlicott had to say, and she was sure he would only be too glad to do anything for his friend.

He rode over, accordingly, early the next day, and confirmed Mistress Medlicott's good opinion by the readiness with which he consented to help in any way he could, and the sensible view he took of the matter.

"The fact is, Mistress Medlicott," he said,

"I got an awfully despairing letter from him, and I set off at once to him (that made me late at the picnic), to argue the point with him. I thought talking was better than writing; but, to my sorrow, he was gone—gone to Dover, they believed, but they could not say where for certain. His Grace had given orders that his letters and parcels were not to be forwarded until he wrote."

"Yes, sad to say, the letter he wrote to May, by the carelessness of a servant, was not delivered to her. He fully expected an answer, which would at once recall him; and so hoped it would be unnecessary to have his letters forwarded to him."

"Exactly; but, by this unfortunate contretemps, being prevented from returning, he must have made up his mind to go somewhere, and given his address to his steward, to send his letters on, I should think. Some confounded 'poste restante'

though, I dare say, where they *will* rest, and where he probably won't get them for months; for, I should think, in the present state of mind, he changes his route fifty times a day."

"Poor boy! I am so sorry for him: May was wrong."

"They were both wrong, Mistress Medlicott, no doubt; but he was insane, simply. Why, if a poor little girl that one loves gets her steam up, and all that kind of thing, a fellow has only got to keep quiet, and do the hurt and sad style of business, and it would be all right in no time. I should as soon think of having a fight with a canary bird as quarrelling with a little, tender woman; beside, they're so awfully pretty in a passion, just like little wavelets on a lake, and about as alarming. Just wait and watch them till the wind goes down, and there you are—in calm water

again, gliding along as though its smooth surface had never been ruffled."

"But," answered Mistress Medlicott, smiling, "I fear there are not many who hold your opinion, or possess your temper. Small ships might be wrecked on tiny waves; and a woman who is given to these outbreaks of temper would make a poor companion for life. The vessel in which your happiness was launched would be in constant peril."

"Well, I don't know; lade it well with Patience and a fair stock of cigars, and I think we should get into port all right. Cigars are an immense investment, when you expect to encounter rough weather—such a soothing effect, you know; you've never tried it, I dare say."

"No, I haven't yet," said Mistress Medlicott, laughing; "but then you see I have been such a fortunate body. I have had no

rough weather to encounter; heavy clouds often, but with their silver lining always, so that I have had no need for your remedy."

"There are some persons whose own serenity reflects itself on those they come in contact with, and the sunshine of whose presence disperses all clouds. Now, after that speech, I'll go, because I am sure I shan't say anything half so fine as that again for a month, at least. Good-bye; rely on my earnest endeavour to bring that ridiculous boy back to his senses."

And Mistress Medlicott watched him ride away, waving his hat to her as he went through the gate, and his handsome, beaming face carried her back through the long vista of past years; and she turned away from the window, murmuring:

"Ah! my poor Bertie, I made you sad, but you know now how well I loved you."

CHAPTER VIII.

The Ladies Murray were seated at the open window of a pleasant house on the Esplanade, watching the sun go down "to its haven under the sea," books and work idly lying in their laps; for, as they said, they could only look out of the window in that dreamy idleness which seems to absorb one at the seaside. They had been out nearly all day; and, in spite of herself, May was better. The pure air and change of scene had seemed to give her fresh life and hope; and she had even asked Lilian if she did not think that Philip would after all some day come back to her, for he must love

her very much, or he would never have written that letter—that letter which night and day she carried with her, and which she had, by Lilian's advice, answered, explaining why she had not done so before, and sent it to his London address to be forwarded. Suddenly, with a heightened colour, Edith exclaimed :

"There's Mr. Prescott!"

"No! where?" and Gertrude sprang from her seat, went on to the balcony, and received a gracious salutation, certainly, from Mr. Prescott.

"What can he be doing down here? how very odd," she said, coming back into the room. "Oh, Edith! poor Mr. Prescott!"

"Now, Gertrude, don't begin that nonsense, I beg; Mr. Prescott has as much right in Dover as we have."

"Yes, Gertrude dear," said Lilian, gently, "I think it is scarcely fair to accuse Edith of

being the cause of his visit to a fashionable English watering-place."

"And also a port from which steamers embark for the Continent. He may be going abroad."

"Poor May ran off directly we mentioned his name," said Gertrude.

"Yes; I hope he is not going to stay here, for it will worry the poor girl dreadfully. But she must try and accustom herself to seeing him," said Lilian; "for he will still continue to visit Auntie: he is an immense favourite of hers."

"Yes, more than anyone, Auntie likes him, I believe. I wonder why?"

"I think he is somehow connected with dear Auntie's early life," said Lilian.

"So do I, from something she said the other day, Lilian; and it's my belief Auntie had some romance in her life, which is renewed by the sight of Mr. Prescott. I

am sure she could never have lived all these years, so sweet as she is and so lovely as I am sure she was, and not have had a lover."

"You cannot imagine such an affliction befalling anyone, can you, Gertrude?"

"No, Edith, not anyone who deserves to be loved. Where's Ma'mselle? not come in yet?"

"I think not; I left her on one of the seats with her book, and she said she would stay till the sun went down. Here she is," continued Lilian, as she heard the door open and someone ascend the stairs, "and chatting and laughing with some one. Who can it be?"

"Ah, my dears! I have brought one old friend from home to see you," said Ma'mselle, as she entered the room followed by Prescott.

"Run and tell May," whispered Lilian to

Gertrude. "Why, Mr. Prescott, have you come to try the balmy breezes?" she said, holding out her hand to him.

"No, not exactly; I am going across to Calais by to-night's boat, but I thought I might do myself the honour of calling on you, and reporting well of Mistress Medlicott, whom I saw yesterday, and who said if I chanced to see you I was to give you her love, and say she was quite well."

"Are you going to make a long stay abroad?" asked Lilian.

"I don't know; I am going on a quest," and looking round the room to make sure May was not present, he said, in a lower voice: "I am going to find that foolish Claverton. I have learned that he is staying with some friend at an old French chateau a mile or two out of Calais; and he is then going, Heaven knows where. I thought seeing him would be better than writing,

and so I am going to try and catch him. They only knew in town yesterday for certain where to send his letters. He only left here the very day before you came. That's the way things happen in this contradictory world."

"How very singular!" said Edith.

"How abominably provoking!" said Gertrude.

"Perhaps it was better so," said Lilian.

"Better so!" echoed Prescott; "are you of the opinion that whatever is, is right?"

"I am, certainly," she said, with something of sadness in her voice.

"Well, I don't know. It seems to me that whatever is, is *wrong* in *this* world, in order to encourage the looking forward to a better, probably."

"Ah! yes, truly," said Ma'mselle; "all the tings here seem to go by contrary rule; and those tings which we long for with a

grand passion, when we get them seems as no worth, or come too late."

"That is a sad view to take of life, dear Ma'mselle," said Lilian.

"I think there is much truth in Ma'mselle's remark, though," said Prescott. "Most of our gazelles end by marrying market-gardeners."

"It's a mistake having gazelles," answered Edith, with the old toss of her imperious head.

"Do you think so?" he said, turning suddenly to her; "I should think it very nice to have one who had learnt to know and love me well."

"Would you, really? Well, all such things are a matter of taste; for my part, I think looking after oneself—being, of course, a life-long employment—is quite sufficient, without adding to it unnecessary burdens and anxieties."

"What a strange girl you are, Edith!" said Lilian.

"Yes," said Gertrude, who had returned from her mission to May, and had been an amused listener to the conversation, "she is so horridly unpoetical and unromantic; if we attempt to read, or quote a bit of poetry, she begins taking it to pieces and making fun of it."

"I thought all young ladies liked poetry, or considered it proper to say so," said Prescott.

"I am afraid, Mr. Prescott, the perversity of my nature would make me assert a contrary opinion to all young ladies; I have a great horror of being one in a flock."

"But you always must be," he said.

"I beg your pardon."

"One alone," he said in a low tone, so low that she could well pretend she did not hear him, and turning to Gertrude, she said:

"Have you sent Briggs to the library, to get that second volume?"

"Yes; I should think she must be back again."

Prescott asked what book they were reading; and they talked for some time on indifferent subjects, and then he rose to take his leave. As he shook hands with Lilian, he said:

"How *is* Lady May?"

"Quite well, I think; Dover has done wonders for her," she answered.

Lilian could not bear to acknowledge that May was ill to anyone whom she thought would assign it to its right cause. Until her aunt had spoken to her of her own secret, she had no idea that she was betraying herself; and, ever since, she had tried dilligently to prevent any manner which should again awaken her aunt's suspicions. She could not bear "to wear her heart upon

her sleeve for daws to peck at;" she felt that the heart knew its own bitterness, and no stranger could intermeddle with its joys. She was very brave, and could endure with that grand resignation, and suffer with that heroic fortitude, which has made the death of martyrs such noble examples; and though she had the tenderest sympathy for those less strong to endure than herself, she felt an anxiety to shield them from notice and observation.

Her hope now had been that, the first bitter moment of parting over, May would have rallied—buried her grief out of sight—carrying her burden with a smiling face, that none should know how it galled and wearied her. Young as Lilian was, she had a very serious view of life, and not as hopeful as was quite consistent with her age; but still her disposition was so gentle and serene, and her temperament so equal and

cheerful, that she was never gloomy or sad, whatever troubled her; and it was only those always living with and loving her, and who had watched her closely, who would have perceived those changes of face and manner which had of late been so remarked. Prescott had asked her if he should call and report progress on his return from the Continent; and to this Lilian gladly consented, for she had great hope that success would attend his efforts, and that poor May and the Duke would be re-united; and so, after this little episode, their days rolled on again in that peaceful, desultory manner, that is such a pleasant change to those who pass a life of excitement, from either business or pleasure, and which, in a great measure, forms its chief source of benefit.

CHAPTER IX.

"MR. WALTER, may I come in?" said Dolly Masham, putting her head in at the library door.

"Yes, Dolly." He was sitting with his feet on the fender, reading, or, at any rate, holding in his hand the newspaper. A wood fire was burning in the grate—he had set light to it himself. It was wet, and the evenings began to grow chilly.

"Come in, old lady. What is it?" he said, pushing a chair.

"Where's Mr. Everard? in his room?"

"Yes."

"And where's the master?"

"Gone down to the Vicarage about some parish business or other."

"Then we can have some talk now. First of all, what is the matter with *you*?"

"Matter, Dolly! nothing."

"Oh, don't tell me. I know there is. You have eaten next to nothing; you're as white as a turnip; and I haven't heard 'In the sunny' something or other, or 'Kathleen Mavourneen,' up and down the stairs for ever so long; now, what is it?"

"Well, Dolly, I don't think this abode is one to inspire us with much cheerfulness, or that I, in particular, have any great cause for rejoicing."

"Well, I do. You've a great deal to be thankful for, and so have we all, ever such a lot more than we, any of us, deserve by a long way. The cat may wink a little, but she ain't blind for all that; and I know there's something more wrong with you than those ills you've got accustomed to. Of course, I know I'm only an ignorant servant,

and have only love's right to talk to you at all; but I can't bear to see you so down without coming to ask if there's anything I can do to help you."

"No, no, Dolly, indeed. You're a good old thing; and you may be sure if you could help me, I would come and ask you," he said.

"Very well, then, I'll say no more; but now I've something to tell *you*. I've been down the street and into one or two cottages, to get a chat about this old place. Took the old folks some tea and sugar, to oil their tongues a bit, you know; and at one Goody Rye's, who's hard upon ninety years old, I got a little information. She says she once lived kitchen-maid at the Priory, with a Madam Aubrey, and she remembers she and an under-housemaid discovered a secret panel in one of the rooms, which opened on to a dark staircase. They were much too

frightened to attempt to go down, and ran and told their mistress, who ordered it at once to be nailed up, and she remembers no more about it."

"And was that in the old wing?"

"That she could not remember, she says; she was but a strip of a girl."

"If it is in those rooms, it leads out into the grounds—no doubt the orchard, Dolly!" said Walter, jumping up. "Why, he was busy looking for a seal there, he said he had lost from his watch chain. He was searching for the entrance to the passage, no doubt."

"Ah! that's it, you may depend; 'the fox is cunning, and so is he who catches him.'"

"We'll wander about a bit in the orchard when we can get him out of the way."

"Yes; and he told me yesterday he was going up to town the end of the week, and should go and see dear Miss Grace."

"See Grace! good Heavens, Dolly!"

"Ah! that's all right; I've written to her."

"What a good thoughtful creature you are; for, though it's ten chances to one he sees her, it is better to give her warning. Poor mother!" he said, sighing.

"Yes, *poor* mother; nobody needs to have poor put before her name more than she does. She's been wrong from beginning to end, and she knows it; and, to my mind, that's the worst trouble there is."

"How do you mean wrong, Dolly?"

"Wrong to marry Mr. Ashleigh, to begin with; and wrong afterwards not to stick to him. Why, Master Walter, if I'd married ever such a wretch, I wouldn't let the world know I thought him so, for them as had warned me of him to crow at me, and say, 'I told you so!'"

"True, Dolly; but every one has not your pluck or patience."

"Oh dear! you might put both those together on the corner of a round table; but it seems to me that, if you get married —and, mind you, I think it's a stupid thing to do—you must stick to your promise. I'm slow to make one, for I'm one of those as will never go mad—I've got too many minds, you know, as I often tell you," she said, laughing. "So I don't like to promise, for fear I shouldn't like to perform; and, you know, it's a solemn thing to say you'll love, *honour*, and obey. You see, you fellows have got the pull of us: you have only to love and cherish—it ain't half so difficult. I wish one of you young gents was going to say it to-morrow."

"Why, Dolly, you said it was a foolish thing to do."

"Ah! circumstances alter cases. You poor boys ought to have homes of your own."

"But we never *shall* have, Dolly, so it

is useless to think of it," he said, with unusual impatience, getting up from his seat, and flinging himself on to the sofa. "I suppose you, who know all the family secrets, know about my respectable uncle?"

"Yes," said Dolly, softly. "Master Walter," she said, after a short pause, "I think he came here last week."

"He? my uncle?"

"Yes; he was as like master as two peas, though he was smothered up in hair, and his hat pulled down over his eyes. But I could see the likeness; and the voice—you would not have known one from the other."

"And what happened? How long did he stay?" asked Walter, eagerly.

"Oh! he stayed about an hour. A lot of loud talking, and stamping about, and away he went."

"But I wonder he ventured to show."

"I'm in hopes he's all right, else he wouldn't. He looked awful white and sad, James said, when he went away; he noticed how like he was to master; and I said rubbish, what next would he say? because I thought they mightn't want it known. But, I dare say, Master gave it him well for coming near him. There's only one being in the world that does wrong as he's lenient to, and that's himself. But I must go, really; I shall have him catching me. God bless you, boy!" and, in her homely face there was a touching look of tenderness, as she said: "When I make too free forgive me, for I never can forget the baby face I watched so anxiously, nor the tiny fingers that curled round mine—and round my heart at the same time. You've had a dreary life of it; but, never forget, dear, behind the clouds the

sun is still shining, and the darkest hour is always before dawn."

Walter rose, and going up to her, his dark eyes glistening, he took her two hard, honest hands in his, and said:

"God bless you, too, Dolly! While *you* live, I shall always know some one loves me."

As he said these words, the door of the library opened suddenly, but was shut again as quickly: and Dolly and he listened intently, as they heard Mr. Ashleigh say eagerly, "Not in there! not in there!" and another voice answer, "Anywhere, only be quick!"

CHAPTER X.

A cold, chill autumn wind was sighing through the poplar trees, now getting rapidly shorn of their summer garments, and shaking the lattice windows of the cottage before which they stood, on a common, thick with furze and heather, among which donkeys and geese, a goat or two, and a lame pony, cropped the short sweet turf, and tried to bear each other's companionship with tolerable composure. A lane—in which the fine oak trees met overhead—ran past the cottage, away to the very small village, which consisted of a Post-office, a row of little houses, a farm, and a church.

In the cottage sat a woman, working at some plain work; a child at play on the ground beside her; another, asleep in a large wicker cradle, which she occasionally touched with her foot, to keep up the gentle motion so soothing to the little one.

"Hark, Rupey! listen, there's a man! Was that uncle calling?" she said, laying her hand on the profusion of flaxen curls which adorned the young gentleman's head, who was giving exercise to his lungs by singing, from an old torn spelling-book, in imitation of the choir at church.

"Amen—no, I don't hear nosing—Glory be——"

"Now, Rupert, I will *not* have it. You are not to sing those sacred words."

"The boys does," stoutly answered the ambitious songster.

"Yes, at church; serious, but not in play. I won't have it. If Rupert's a good

boy, he shall go and learn to sing pretty, and then mother will love to hear him," she said, trying coaxing, as a look of rebellion came over the child's face. "Now look, creep upstairs, and see if uncle's awake, and I'll give you a ha'penny, to go to Mrs. Nuttall's, for a 'sweetie.'"

Very reluctantly the little man rose, and laid down the book on the wooden stool on which he had been seated, and went up the stairs that led to the room above, and which were shut off from the sitting-room by a door.

"Leave the door open, and then you can see. Don't you fall; now, go steady," she said, as, having stood on tip-toe to reach the latch, the child had succeeded in getting the door open.

"He's awake. Where's my ha'penny?" he said, before he was well back in the room.

"Here it is," answered his mother, reaching it him from the shelf. "Now, don't you be gone long, and don't play with Jemmy Davis nor Bill Cooper, but come back as soon as ever you've got your sweetie."

"Es," said the child, scarcely waiting for the conclusion of his mother's speech before he was out in the wind, with no shelter for his head but his curly locks; and the mother, laying down her work, just peeping at the sleeping baby, went upstairs.

On a bed in the clean, pleasant little room, lay an old man, thin and spare, with a sad look in his pale, blue eyes, which spoke of mental weakness and suffering.

"I want to get up, Alice," he said.

"Do you, dear? So you shall, if you like," she said, kindly.

"Is the boy come home from school?"

She did not answer, but busied herself about the room, till he repeated, sharply:

"Alice, is the boy come back from school?"

"No, dear; no."

"He's late, isn't he?"

"No, I think not."

He closed his eyes, and she stood quietly by the bed a few moments; and then he said, suddenly:

"Will they want that kitchen table home to-night, at the Vicarage?"

"Oh, no; they're in no hurry," she answered.

"But I'd better get up and finish it, Alice," he said. "Alice, I suppose we *must* let the boy go—it is selfish to keep him. He says he'll make a gentleman of him, our handsome boy. You'll be brave—you'll let him go—and not cry, Alice. Oh no, no! not so bitterly. We'll have him back

again, we will." And then the tears rolled down his cheek, and he sobbed himself to sleep like a tired child.

The woman stayed by him a little while, and then went down to her baby, expecting to find the little boy returned from his quest after sugar plums; but he was not there, and she opened the door to look for him. The wind blew roughly, whirling the leaves about in eddies, and the sky looked wild and dark.

"Send my boy in, if you see him, will you?" she said to a woman who passed.

"Yes; how is the old man?"

"Just the same; very wandering. Thinks still I'm his wife, and talks of all his trouble."

"Poor old man! Please God to take 'im, it 'ud be a happy release. Here comes your little chap, along with a gentleman."

"Why, it's Dr. Stillwell, come to see after poor uncle. He is so good to him;" and, nodding good-bye to the woman, she stepped back to make way for the Doctor.

"Well, Mrs. Wenham, how d'ye do? and how is our poor patient?"

"The same as you left him, sir, exactly. Take a chair, sir; and Rupert, you leave the gentleman alone. And you was a naughty boy to be so long gone," she said, in a low voice.

"Rupert, do you call him?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes, sir; it's an uncommon name, and a finer one than we should have choose. But it was to please poor uncle. It was the name of his own son."

"I thought so," murmured the Doctor.

"I beg your pardon, sir. What did you say?"

"Nothing—nothing. I was thinking

aloud. Were your father and Master Poyntz brothers?"

"No, sir; we ain't no relations at all, but we've got in the way of calling him uncle. A many in the village does, though I don't think he's got a single relative left. He was always partial to me, for my mother was brought up with his poor wife—they was out at nurse together. Grandmother, she died when mother was but a year old; so Mrs. Nuttall—she as keeps the little shop, sir, down the lane; leastways, as used to, I should say; it's her son has it now—she brought mother and Mrs. Poyntz up; and they lived with her till they was both married. Oh, sir! what a pretty creature poor Alice Poyntz was, to be sure. She was called 'Queen' here, sir: she'd such a lady air with her. But, lor! how I'm a running on."

"Please go on: I am most anxious to hear

anything you can tell me of my poor old friend's former history."

"Well, sir, it's quite a story like, I can assure you; and, if you've a mind, I can tell it you."

"Do, pray," said the Doctor.

"Well—Rupe, you be quiet, there's a good little fellow! Rock baby, and keep her asleep, while I tell the gentleman a story."

"Tell about 'Jat and the Diant?'"

"No, no; that's your story. Be quiet, now. Well, sir, as I was saying, Alice Conway—as she was afore she married Peter Poyntz—come to Mrs. Nuttall's a wee bit of a thing, not more than a month or two old. Mrs. Nuttall was very dark, they say, about the child, and said nothing where she came from; but, any way, she grew up to be a young woman grown, and beautiful as a rose. I know I was but a bit of a thing

when she used to come and see mother; and I used to sit and stare at her, and think she must have come out of a picture-book. Poyntz was then, you see, a fine, strong, good-looking fellow as any in the streets; and proud enough he was to think he'd carried off the Queen from all the rest of the fellows; for every one was after her, you may be sure."

"She was married, then, when you remember her?"

"Oh, yes! sir, and had got a dear little boy, as she used to bring with her."

"Rupert?" said the Doctor.

"Yes, sir — Rupert. Well, when the boy was about ten, or maybe more, a gentleman came down to the village, and asked for Mrs. Nuttall's; and from her house he went to Peter Poyntz's. Ever so long he stayed there; and the next day we heard as the boy was to go away to be educated, and

brought up as a gentleman. Every one thought at first as it was a fine thing; but they soon altered their minds when poor Queen Alice went about the village with her wan, white face, and Peter ceased his merry songs, and give up his cricket club; and they learnt that the boy was gone for ever—that he was never to come back more—never to own his poor father or mother, but be a gentleman, and lead a gentleman's life, and come into a fortune."

"And they consented to this?" exclaimed the Doctor.

"Yes, sir; they said it was for his good. How could they let their feelings stand in the way? But she, poor thing! was not so brave as Peter: it killed our poor Queen, sir; and she lays under the yew tree in the old churchyard; and poor Peter calls me 'Alice' now, and thinks that I am her." And the tears came into her eyes as she spoke, and

she bent down to look into the cradle at the sleeping child—the little face was so often the talisman that summoned smiles, that it seemed natural to look there to have the tears chased away.

"And they have never looked on the boy's face since?" asked the Doctor.

"Not as I know of, sir. They've had, you know, a yearly sum paid them ever since, which has been a blessing to poor old Peter since he has grown so feeble and simple. He must have gone in the workhouse but for that; and, besides, sums of money have come to him at different times, so that he has wanted for nothing; and he will be able to be buried very handsome, which is a great comfort."

"What took him to Haseley Mere?"

"Well, sir, when poor Queen died he was that restless, he could not work at his trade—he couldn't do nothing; and he was a very

good scholard, so our parson—who's always been a right down friend to him—he persuaded him to try and get a schoolmaster's place, and said he'd help him to it, and recommend him; and soon he got that situation; but I suppose, poor dear! when he began to grow feeble, and felt as though the lamp were a-burning low, he'd like to come back to his old home, and be laid to rest beside her; and that's where we shall lay him, sir, when his time comes; and I don't think it will be long now."

"Did he say anything to you about his son after I left him?" asked the Doctor.

"No, sir; yes—I beg your pardon, he did: he said how handsome he'd grown, and talked like as though he'd seen him; but his head, you see, has been a-wandering ever since."

"I *knew* so," said the Doctor, jumping up from his seat. "He *did* see him, Mrs.

Wenham, and that caused his sudden illness. I have seen him, and had long talks with him of this poor old man. It is from him the sums of money have come from time to time."

"Did he tell you so, sir?" asked the woman.

"No—I only guess it; but this young man's name is Rupert, and his interest in Poyntz can only be accounted for in this way; but what I am at a loss to understand is, how the boy himself can have thus permitted himself to be weaned from his natural parents—how they can have induced him to promise to be a stranger to them for ever."

"Well, you see, sir, his years was not many when he went away; and, no doubt, they preached up to him all the fine things he could do with money, and how he should go to school, and have horses to ride and

drive—and all such as tempts young folks, poor lad!"

"I wonder if he would come and see his father before he dies, if I wrote to him?"

"Hark! he's calling," interrupted Mrs. Wenham; and, flying upstairs, she left the Doctor alone with the children, when, to his dismay, the baby in the cradle instantly woke, and expressed its intention (in very emphatic baby language) of being taken up.

"Dear, dear! master Rupert; what's to be done? Rock away, my lad; perhaps he'll go to sleep again," said the Doctor, getting up and peering through his spectacles down to the little face, which was getting redder and redder with its violent crying.

"It's a little girl, and se won't. You must tate her out," said the little man, tugging at the Doctor's coat tails.

"Do what?" asked the embarrassed visitor.

"Tate her ut out o' the tadle."

"Oh dear, no! I can't; go, call your mother—quick; the small thing will strangle itself. Hushey!—hushey!" said the poor Doctor, as Rupert carried his sturdy legs upstairs, screaming, "Mother!" and when she came hurriedly into the room, she could scarcely forbear a smile to see the tall, portly form of her guest kneeling down by the crib, surveying the little struggling, screaming baby with such anxiety.

When it was in its mother's arms, and peace was again restored, Mrs. Wenham said she thought the Doctor might go up and see Poyntz. She had just given him some jelly, which he always ate voraciously; but he seemed weaker every time he woke.

The Doctor followed Mrs. Wenham up-

stairs, therefore, and, going to the bedside, took the thin hand in his, and said, gently:

"God bless you, my dear old friend! How are you to-day?"

"Oh, bravely! bravely! Going to get up now. Has the boy been good at school?"

"Yes, *very* good."

"That's well; but he doesn't come to see his old father. They won't let him, you know. It isn't *his* fault. No, no—bless him!—not *his* fault. Alice! Alice!"

"Yes—I'm here."

"I must get up—I must. What! nursing the boy? I'm not strong enough to take him. What makes me so weak?"

"You've been ill, deary!" she answered.

"Ah! then that's why I dream so strangely—always dreaming one thing—that that bit of a boy's grown up, and gone away; that some fine folks have got him—

our boy, Alice—foolish—foolish dreams!" And then he laughed a sad laugh—sadder than tears—which changed to tears as suddenly; and then again he sobbed himself to sleep.

"Very sad," said the Doctor, moving away; "but the rest will soon come—he's much changed. I shall go back at once by the next train, Mrs. Wenham, and at once communicate with the young man whom I fancy is the son of this poor creature. If I can, I will bring him here. In the mean while, let him want for nothing, and instantly communicate with me if there is any change. Who will follow him to his last resting-place?"

"Oh dear! a sight of people, sir, for he's so loved in the village. Why, you would have blessed yourself if you had seen his poor wife's burying. Six young married women bore the pall, on which were laid a

large cross of white flowers. Then came poor Peter, alone; and then, two-and-two—two-and-two—all down ever so far; and the school-children walking first, each with white flowers in their hands, singing a hymn; and they threw the flowers into the grave when they lowered the coffin, and the cross, too; and, as soon as the grave was covered in, the parson's little girls came and laid a beautiful wreath of flowers like a crown on it. Mother did like that: she said it was such a pretty thought—that the cross she'd carried to her grave, but the crown she was to wear in heaven."

The Doctor nodded his reply, and slipping a shilling into the hand of little Rupert, he hurried from the cottage.

There lay another old man, passing away from this world and its cares; but in a different home and with different surroundings, little as that mattered to either of

them now. Instead of the whitewashed walls, rich paper covered these; in place of the little truckle pallet, with its hard mattress and patchwork quilt, the dying form lay on a feather bed, beneath damask satin curtains, with a rich embroidered coverlid over the shrunken limbs. Rich carpets, on which no footstep could be heard, covered the floors, and servants with hushed voices and gentle tread ministered to the sick man. Two physicians' carriages stood before his door, and all that wealth could purchase was there to stay the icy hand of death; but in vain—the fiat had gone forth, and Major Carrington was on his death-bed.

Rupert had been hastily summoned at the first change, and had not left all night; and the day was waning, and another night coming on. He might last, the doctors thought, but it was doubtful. Oh! what

would Rupert give for one ray of consciousness in that poor dying man that he might release him from his promise, and let him go to his poor old father, and ere *he* died ask his forgiveness and his blessing! How, as he sat alone beside that death-bed, did he ponder on the folly of human pride—to end in this after all. What would it matter to him when he was laid low, whether he had lived the rough, happy, country carpenter's son, following his father's trade, among the homely surroundings of his birth, or had been the gay, fortunate, young soldier, with wealth at his command—a scholar and a gentleman? what would it matter if the time had been spent well and nobly, the duties well fulfilled, the one great hope and faith kept pure and undefiled? The fashion of this earth passes away, the "brief life" here is so soon ended; the life—the tearless life—"is there,"

beyond. At such moments — moments when we watch beside the dying—how worthless seem the things we once so valued.

Thus thought Rupert; thus longed he to repair, as far as he could in this life, the wrong he had been led into. Why was he tempted to leave his humble home, his beautiful, gentle mother, whom he could well remember, and whom he felt he had never seen equalled, save by one—his good, true, honest father? Why had he been tempted? and why had the Major tempted him? what was the mystery? should he ever know now?

As he sat thus thinking, the invalid moved, opened his eyes, and a ray of light and recognition shone in them. Rupert sprang to him.

"Uncle, do you know me?"

The poor helpless tongue could not frame

the answer, but he smiled, and eagerly pointed to a cabinet.

"Do you want something out of that?" asked Rupert.

Yes, he did; but, oh! how difficult to make Rupert understand where and what. After many vain attempts, he produced a packet, and the poor dying man grasped it eagerly, tried vainly to give some directions to Rupert, and then, pushing the packet into his hand, and with a violent effort uttering the words, "Wrong will never come right," he fell back—dead.

CHAPTER XI.

THE inmates of the Manor House had returned to its pleasant shelter, and resumed their old habits of life, save Gertrude, who, having now passed her sixteenth birthday, had implored immunity from all further instruction, making a faithful promise to her aunt that one day in every week she would read steadily for two hours with Dr. Stillwell until the spring; on these conditions, a town house was to be secured, and she was to revel to her heart's delight in the London season.

May was wonderfully recovered. Prescott had been unsuccessful in his search, but he had received a letter from Philip saying that

he thought he had been too hasty, and that he should return to England, and go down to Claverton, and continue the improvements he had begun, waiting and hoping for brighter days. This information he imparted at once to Mistress Medlicott, who, of course, told May, at the same time assuring her that the letter she had written would doubtless reach the Duke in time, and that he would fly to her at once, so that the light of hope once more beamed in May's tender, grey eyes, and smiles made the dimples come back to her cheeks, to which its original roundness and colour were fast returning.

"I can't say I regret this *contretemps* between the Duke and May," said Edith one day, soon after their return from Dover, "for it has improved her wonderfully. It is astonishing to see her check herself if she is going to give a cross answer."

"Perhaps a Duke and a quarrel a-piece

wouldn't hurt one or two more," said Gertrude, slyly looking up at Edith.

"Perhaps not; it might make some of us less pert."

"And some more forbearing," answered Lilian, gently laying her hand on Edith's arm.

"Well, Lily, I am never cross or severe to you; but, really, Gertrude does provoke me," answered Edith, reddening at her sister's rebuke.

"Do I, Edith, really?" said Gertrude, jumping up and kissing her; "then I'll try not any more, for those who make others angry are by far the most to blame, I think. I do it in fun, and talk nonsense without thinking. Some spiteful fairy has given me his tongue, I believe, or else one long enough for two. See now, from this moment I'll amend."

"And you must promise to be patient

with the child, too, Edie," said Lilian, smiling approvingly at Gertrude.

"I'll try; but I've such a small stock of patience, it's soon exhausted. I wonder how it will stand the test of the infant school? I begin to-morrow."

"Never, Edith! You are not really going to take the school?" said Gertrude.

"Yes, I am, till poor Miss Lambert is better. Only in the morning—I can't stand twice a day. It's worth some trouble to have secured in one's lifetime such gratitude as the poor little schoolmistress expresses."

"Yes; but for your kind offer she must have resigned, I hear," said Lilian. "You never tell us any of your good deeds; but for Briggs we should know nothing of them. She tells me that by your solicitation and kind offer to do her work, the vicar is going to give her a month's holiday, and try

her again ; and I think the reason of a certain reduction of someone's allowance is due to the fact that Miss Lambert is to try sea air during her month's holiday."

"Oh, nonsense, Lil. Hark! there's the front door bell; such a miserable day, too. I did not think we should have a soul. How tremendously the wind blows. I dislike it so—it sounds so tiring. I can't help fancying it's some living thing tearing about so, and that it will die of fatigue; and that makes me feel as if I was racing about, too."

"The Duke of Claverton is in the drawing-room, my Lady; Frere told me to tell you," said Briggs.

"The Duke!" exclaimed the three girls, starting from their seats.

Lilian recovered herself quickly, and demanded quietly if Mistress Medlicott had been told.

Yes; Mistress Medlicott was in the drawing-room when his Grace arrived.

"Shall I do your hair, my Lady? said Briggs to Edith; "it's very rough."

"Oh dear, no! thank you—I have that penance to undergo for dinner; that's quite enough for my sins."

"I thought those cushions you have been luxuriating in would be ruin to the hair. But come, we must go, dear. Gertrude, you go to May. No, stay; you two girls go down, and I will go to May and break the news. He has her letter, I trust, at last."

Mistress Medlicott had risen with quiet dignity to receive her unexpected visitor; but it was impossible to be either cool or dignified long with the young man who, flying to her, seized both her hands, and poured forth with rapid utterance his penitence, and his own self-reproaches. In a

few minutes he had called himself every opprobrious epithet he could possibly think of; and then he said, gently pushing Mistress Medlicott back into her chair:

"Now, you will let me see her? you will let me ask her to forgive me? and we will never give you all this trouble again."

"Yes, you shall see her," said Mistress Medlicott now he would let her speak, with her old kindly smile; "and you must both try never to be such naughty children again."

"We will—we will! I was so awfully glad to hear she was so ill—no, not glad she was ill, but glad—you know what I mean—glad that she loved me enough to be ill, poor, sweet pet! Oh! do send her to me; or may I go up to her? or what shall I do?"

"Be patient here, if you can, till I send her."

Very *patiently* he paced the room, thinking the moments ages, making up endless speeches to say to her, wondering what she would look like, if he should think her altered; taking up a book and putting it down again without looking at it; and, finally, going to the window and looking out at the grey sky, the dead leaves whirling in eddies up the avenue, and thinking of the day in the wood, when that whispered "Yes, Philip," had given him such joy. Buried in these thoughts, and stilled in his restlessness, as he lived those moments over again, he did not hear the door open, nor the gentle tread behind him, but, like an echo of his thoughts, there came an almost whispered "Philip!"

He turned, caught her in his arms, kissed her hair, her eyes, her lips, her little white trembling hands—murmuring the while, "My own May! My pet! My treasure! You

have forgiven me?—say so." And yet how could she whilst he kept her lips imprisoned? At length he led her to a seat, and, kneeling down before her, he said:

"Now, I will have just four words and no more, which shall lock in this sad episode of our lives for ever—never more to be thought of or alluded to. Just say, 'Philip, I forgive you.'"

"But it is I who ought to say, 'Philip, forgive me,'" said May, smiling through her tears, like a summer shower in the sunshine.

"*No, no;* do as I tell you—'Philip, I forgive you.' I shall not move from here until you say so. That's well," he answered, as gently she did his bidding. "There, no more of this: it is ended, thank Heaven, for ever. We will talk only now of the future, that future which we shall make so bright."

"Yes, Philip," interrupted May, "but I must be grateful, too, for what has happened, bitter as it has been, because I think it has made me better; more worthy of your love —that love which my foolish, petulant temper might have tried beyond its endurance. I do not think, really, I shall ever be so foolish again. Don't kneel there any more; sit down and tell me—oh! I don't mind what you tell me—only talk. I never thought to hear your voice again." And as he seated himself beside her, the little head, with its glossy chestnut hair, dropped on his shoulder, and a rain of tears washed away all bitterness between them for ever.

He was to stay a week; and Mistress Medlicott promised him that, ere he went, some definite period should be fixed for the wedding. He tried, by a variety of arguments, to assure her it ought to be at once, but she could not see the justice of any of them; but

at length she so far relented as to promise that it might be early in the spring.

Edith's intention to keep the infant-school was a great subject of amusement, and the Duke declared he would come and be writing-master; but when Edith assured him they only wrote straight strokes on a slate, he thought he did not feel equal to that, but trusted she would endeavour to find some way of making him useful.

"The excitement is great enough, I'm told, with only Edith for a superintendent," said Gertrude. "If a live Duke goes too, I don't know what will happen. Little children, who have been in a perpetual state of 'no shoes to come to school,' have suddenly discovered some; Pollys and Sallys, who were kept at home to mind endless babies, have found substitutes; mothers, who had so many ways to spend pence beside sending their children to school, have found some

superabundant coppers; and, in short, Edith, your school will be overflowing."

"The more the merrier, dear; I am only thankful that it is not in the summer."

"I trust the weather will not be so tempestuous to-morrow, Edith; I shall scarcely like your going," said Mistress Medlicott.

"Oh! a good blow will do me good, Auntie; I don't mind the wind when I'm out in it—it's lying and listening to it I hate so!"

"But the rain is so tremendous, too. They seem trying which will get the best of it," said the Duke. "I back the rain. The sky looks full of rain: I believe we shall have some weeks of it."

"I don't mind if it will only be frosty and snowy for Christmas," said Gertrude.

"You will spend it here, won't you, Philip?" asked May softly.

"Yes, my darling, if you wish me, and 'Auntie' will let me."

"What's that 'Auntie's' to do?" asked Mistress Medlicott.

"Let Philip spend Christmas with us," said May.

"Yes, by all means; and I further instruct you, May, to write in my name and invite our good friends the Prescotts over to dinner on Thursday; you can mention that it is to meet his Grace the Duke of Claverton," said Auntie, smiling, as she rose to go into the drawing-room.

"I may join you soon, may I not?" whispered the Duke, as she passed him.

"Oh dear, yes! as soon as you like."

The happy, bright evening seemed to fly. The tempest, which raged outside, was unheeded by the happy occupants of that pleasant, brilliantly-lighted room, with its sparkling fire, the flames dancing up the

chimney in a sort of wild joy, as though it shared in the general happiness. The scent of the hothouse flowers, tastefully arranged by Lilian; the air of mingled comfort and elegance; and the light hearts, with the burden which had lain on them so long removed, made that one evening in the old Manor House, with its peaceful, uninterrupted joy, long remembered by them all.

CHAPTER XII.

SEATED over a large wood fire in the library at the Priory, are Everard and Walter in earnest conversation. The dessert is untouched upon the table: they have drawn their chairs to the pleasant, cheery blaze, which the damp, cold night makes so welcome. The rain is falling heavily, and its continual plashing sound, and the dripping from the verandah, mingles with the crackling of the logs as they send their sparks merrily up the large chimney.

"He went this morning, then, to town?" said Walter.

"Yes; he has been very strange and silent ever since last Sunday, when that

person, whoever it was, came; but I have not seen the lights once since you were down last: he sees we suspect him, I believe."

"He keeps something hidden there which he does not wish us to see, it's my belief. If I was sure he was safe in town, I would try to get in and explore."

"Oh, Walter, I think that wouldn't be quite the thing," said Everard, smiling.

"Well, perhaps not; but such a father drives one to do what one would never dream of."

"What could he keep there?—papers, do you mean?"

"Yes; you know I have long had a suspicion that there has been something queer in the business way. He always shirks any allusion to the foreign life and what he did in Australia, though I have frequently tried to pump him.

I think he got into some hobble, and lives in dread of discovery; and perhaps this worthy brother may be implicated, or be in the secret somehow."

"It may be so; it is not pleasant, any way."

"By no means; it gives one something the sensation of living on a volcano. Are you going to dine at the Manor House on Thursday?" said Walter, taking up a note lying on the table.

"Yes. Can't you get down? they don't dine till eight, you know."

"Well, I might; but I don't much care about it."

"What's the matter with you, Walter?" said Everard, kindly; "you are not a bit like yourself lately."

"Oh! I don't know, old man; there are times when everything goes askew, or we fancy so, and the sunshine seems to drop out of one's life."

"At your age, Walter? No, no; I can't hear that: it should be all ablaze with sunlight."

Walter shook his head, as he answered:

"Well, perhaps really they are only shadows which come over our eyes, and hide the brightness now and then. I shall see clearer soon. How goes on your pupil? does he improve?" he said, as if wishing to change the conversation.

"Yes, I think he does—he's very earnest. I have discovered, I think, his strongest motive for learning."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, the old magic—love! He is devoted to our village beauty, Kathleen O'Brian!"

Walter got up from his seat and put a fresh log on the fire before he answered, and then he said:

"Indeed! It were as well to break to him that he is throwing his love away."

"Why?" asked Everard, looking suddenly and searchingly in Walter's face.

"Because," he said, taking a cigar from his pocket, lighting it deliberately, and offering the case to Everard, "because she is engaged."

"She is! Who is the fortunate man?"

"Well, I suppose it is no secret: at least, not from *you*—Rupert Carrington."

"What, Walter? Rupert Carrington! Marry a girl like that?"

"Yes; odd, isn't it?"

"Beyond everything strange. And they are really to be married?"

"As to that," said Walter between the puffs of his cigar, "I know not. I believe there is some great obstacle—known to the young lady—which is to prevent this marriage, so they have exchanged vows, and parted."

"A village romance, I declare. I am

glad you are not the hero, though, Walter: she is dangerously beautiful."

"Think so?"

"Yes, I do; and I feared you did."

"Ah! I shall ring for some coffee, and tell them to send Dolly here. I should like to hear what she has to say about my father and his visitor."

Everard had watched him keenly during this conversation, but he said no more to him; only to himself he said, "Poor Walter!"

Dolly obeyed the summons; but she could not give them much information, beyond the fact that the visitor had been again; that there were very high words between him and her master; and she had heard him say, as he came down the stairs: "You had better do as I ask you." She said she considered it very likely that Mr. Ashleigh did put

papers and things he did not wish seen in that wing; and by moving about there, with a light, wished to keep up the alarm about a ghost, so that no one should care to enter into it. She had always a suspicion that his money was not come by very honestly; and she believed, lately, that Stephens, the butler, knew a good deal about his master's secrets.

"He told me he was going to town for two or three days; but, bless you! he'll come down quite sudden on us—perhaps to-morrow."

"Is he asked on Thursday, Everard?" said Walter.

"Yes; but, according to his own story, he will be away, so I shall only accept for ourselves. Say you'll go."

"Yes, yes, Master Walter; go, by all means," said Dolly. "Take him, Master Everard; he wants rousing up. He's getting as

lazy as Ludlam's dog, that leaned against the wall to bark. And, you know, you're to have such grand company there, too. The Duke of Claverton's staying there: he's engaged to one of the ladies. There was a bit of a row of some kind—so Briggs, the maid, told our Ellen—and they thought the match wouldn't come off; but it's all right again."

"Why, Dolly, you are as good as a Village Gazette," said Everard. "And which of the ladies is it?" he asked.

"Ah! I don't know for sure. Is there one Mary?"

"No—May."

"That's it; I remember now. Yes, that's it. It's the prettiest anyhow, they say."

"That's a matter of taste, Dolly."

"So it is. How I wish you two young gentlemen were going to marry two of them—for they're dear good young ladies, I hear."

"Too good for us, Dolly," said Everard, with a slight sigh.

"I should like to see the two that are, that's all I can say. But you go now, Mr. Walter, and have a pleasant evening, and brighten yourself up, and let's have the old tunes again. I miss them sorely, and am obliged to sing 'em myself; and, somehow or other, it don't sound the same thing. Make him go, Mr. Everard."

"Oh, yes; he'll go, Dolly."

"Very well, mind he does;" and good Dolly went off, full of a hope that dear Master Walter was troubling about one of those ladies, and that if he only went there often enough she could not fail to love him, and he would be married to a lady of title, and be brother-in-law to a Duke, just what he deserved, for nothing on earth was too high, too good, or great for her darling.

The brothers sat talking till late in the evening, the plashing of the rain keeping up its dreary accompaniment to their somewhat sad conversation. At last Walter said:

"I think we had better go to bed now, old man; talking won't mend one's troubles. But I feel as if we were on the eve of some great change in our lives, either for good or evil. In short, I am afraid I am—what I never was in my life before—nervous," he said, with a somewhat sad smile.

"Coming events do sometimes cast their shadows before, I perfectly believe, Walter; but, as they are beyond our power to control, it is unwise to think too much about them."

"Do you believe in presentiments, Everard?"

"I believe in more than I should like to acknowledge," said Everard, smiling; "for

some people would think me mad—others wicked—so I keep it all to myself. I do not want to question or inquire into the truth of these fancies. They are my comfort; and I think such comfort is divinely granted to those who humbly seek for a strength beyond their own, to help them to bear the evils and grievances of this life." As he spoke the last words the door opened, and Dolly, looking in with an excited face, said:

"There's a light in the wing now, and so it *can't* be master. Do come!"

END OF VOL. II.

LONDON: PRINTED BY WM. CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET AND CHARING CROSS.

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
3 0112 049772632